



SiSAL Journal

Special Issue on Self-Access
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Self-Access in Japan: Introduction

Jo Mynard, Kanda University of International Studies, Japan

Welcome to issue 7(4) of *SiSAL Journal*, which is a special issue on Japan. It is my hope that future issues can be guest-edited special issues from other parts of the world, too. In this introduction, I will begin by commenting on some issues likely to arise in the Japanese context in the coming years along with some practical ways for us to respond. The ideas are based on plenary talks I gave this year in Mexico (see Benson, Chávez Sánchez, McLoughlin, Mynard, & Peña Clavel (2016) for a summary) and Japan (Mynard, 2016; also see Lin (2016) for a summary). I will then give a brief summary of each contribution to this special issue.

The History of Self-Access in Japan

Japan is a relative newcomer to the field of self-access, and although there are informal reports that some centres were established in schools and language academies as early as the 1980s, most university-based self-access learning centres (SALCs) did not start to appear until at least 2000. The Japan Association of Self-Access Learning (JASAL) provides a 'Language Learning Space Registry' service (<https://jasalorg.com/lis-registry/>) where 34 centres in Japan have so far entered details. The earliest SALCs on the registry are Soka University, Tokyo (1996), Nagoya University of Commerce and Business (1999), Kobe Shoin Women's University (2000), and Kanda University of International Studies, Chiba (2001). It would be fair to say that although the field of self-access is well established in other parts of the world, it is only beginning to attract mainstream interest in Japan. Membership of JASAL has grown from a membership of 25 when it was established in 2005 to its current membership of 255 (Yamashita, 2016). At the recent JASAL conference held in Kobe in December 2016, many of the participants were new to the field or gathering information that would help them to set up a new centre in a university or school in Japan.

Shifting Self-Access Environments

After enjoying several decades of relative stability, self-access environments are certainly starting to shift rapidly. Until now, SALCs have tended to be physical

locations or centres where students are able to find resources and support for their self-access language learning. Japanese SALCs have been influenced by SALCs in other parts of the world, especially Hong Kong, and many centres worldwide have looked more or less the same for decades. As I see it, three environmental shifts in particular will affect our field in Japan in the coming years. I will outline each of these shifts and then in the subsequent section outline three (among many) responses we can consider.

Shift 1: Learning environments

Traditionally, Japan has offered few opportunities for language learners to interact in the target language (TL) outside the classroom (SALCs are still relatively rare). The current shift is that language learners now have access to multiple online / digital environments in which to access the TL and communities of TL users (Benson, 2016), and this is challenging the nature of traditional self-access support and indeed language education in general. In Japan, one feature of a SALC is to provide an opportunity for TL practice, but if students no longer need to come to a physical centre to access TL resources or communities, is self-access still relevant?

Shift 2: Informal learning

Traditionally, support for language learning in Japan has mainly been available via a classroom environment. This might be at school, university or in one of the many ‘eikaiwas’ (private language academies). Informal learning via MOOCs, apps, and social learning tools is on the rise and it is now commonplace for people to study languages outside the structure of a traditional course or institution. One success story is Duolingo (<http://duolingo.com>), which 120,000,000 people worldwide are using to learn languages. It is likely that access to free learning tools will affect course enrolments, including for language courses, and this in turn may affect attendance at institutional SALCs.

Shift 3: Government and institutional guidelines

There is a realisation worldwide that in a rapidly shifting world it is not enough to teach students content knowledge, as the emphasis will be on constant learning and re-learning throughout their lives. It is important that they have the skills to be able to know *how to learn*. In Europe, governments are emphasising ‘21st Century Skills’ which include the higher-order skills needed for deeper learning. In Japan, the government is emphasising ‘Active Learning’ through the entire education system, a term I interpret to mean lifelong and autonomous learning. Those of us

working in self-access have been actively focussing on promoting autonomous lifelong learning for years, but now we have to be aware that classroom-based educators will *all* be asked to promote it. This is obviously good news for learners and the field of language teaching in general, but what will happen to self-access professionals when we no longer have this ‘special’ role alongside content or language educators?

Responses

Clearly, we as SALC professionals need to respond to these shifts if the field is to continue to not just survive but thrive and grow. There are many ways in which we can respond, but in this introduction I will focus on three key ways; in short I will argue that there is a place for a physical SALC as long as we ensure that they are social hubs where students naturally come for emotional and learning support.

Response 1: Focus on social dimensions of learning

One important starting point is to focus on why learners come to a centre. This might vary from SALC to SALC so it is important for SALC staff to conduct their own research. In the case of my own SALC at Kanda University of International Studies, Chiba, we know from surveys and other research that social factors play a significant role. This is echoed in researched published by other colleagues in Japan. For example, Hughes, Krug, & Vye (2012) investigated reasons why learners came to their SALC in Saitama, Japan and why regular users continued to come. They found that students initially came for a variety of reasons, but the regular users continued to come for social reasons: “social collaborative learning amongst peers at the Center is the most significant long-term motivational factor for students to become involved with learning English” (p. 163). Murray and Fujishima (2013; 2016) suggest that informal social interaction in their L-Café at Okayama University, Japan is the most important factor for the success of their SALC, where people are the main resources and reciprocal learning opportunities exist for everyone.

Benson (2016) makes the case that learners need self-access more than they need a traditional classroom and, taking an ecological perspective, argued that a SALC is one of many learning environments available to a learner.

Doffs and Hobbs (2011, citing Ushioda, 2011) write that “...the key to enabling students’ own motivation to grow and develop seems to lie in orchestrating the social learning environment in such a way that students want to learn” (p. 26), but how can we create the kinds of social environments that appeal to our learners?

Again, this will vary from SALC to SALC, and it is important to gather input, insights and involvement from the users themselves, but many successful SALCs have focussed on the following:

- Events and social activities held in the SALC
- Self-access tasks involving a social element
- Awareness-raising that social factors play a role in language learning
- Laying out the centre in ways which promote social interaction
- Initiating, supporting and promoting learning communities
- Employing student staff and/or encouraging students to volunteer

Response 2: Focus on affective factors

Affective factors include moods, feelings, emotions, preferences, beliefs and attitudes, and these clearly affect language learning. Traditionally, we viewed the emotional and cognitive sides of learning as separate, but we now know from research in psychology and neuroscience that cognition and affect are bidirectional; for example, negative affective states influence learning and performance (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008). We also know from work in distance learning, for example in the UK, that in non-classroom learning environments, there is a need “to focus on positive emotions and attitudes and build in strategies in the materials that can help students to maintain a positive outlook” (Hurd, 2008, p. 232). Dealing with learners’ emotions and feelings presents a challenge for those of us working in the field of self-access “with a background based more on pedagogy than on psychology” (Tassinari & Ciekanski, 2013, p. 263). One way we might help our learners to manage their emotional states in order to benefit their language learning is to explicitly teach them some meta-affective strategies (Oxford, 2011). For example:

- How to control emotions
 - understanding one’s emotional responses
 - reflection-in-action
 - mindfulness and presence
- How to generate and maintain motivation
 - positive self-talk
 - rewards
 - enhancing interest in a task

Such strategies can be taught in class, in SALC workshops, in advising sessions or they can be embedded into SALC tasks and worksheets. Affective strategies and support are needed for all kinds of learning situations and new environments for learners to persist and be successful lifelong language learners. SALC staff have a significant role to play in offering this affective support as it may not be available elsewhere.

Response 3: Promoting learner autonomy

As learners now have access to multiple learning environments, opportunities to interact with TL users, and multiple tools for language learning, it is more important than ever to ensure that learners know how to make the most of the opportunities. Another way of phrasing this is as the need to develop learners' "inner resources for environmental interaction" and to learn how to "interact more autonomously with the affordances in their environments" (Benson, 2016). Some ways of promoting these inner resources might be promoting the following through our advising and teaching:

- Ongoing reflection
- Personal goal-setting
- An awareness of strategies, resources and environments
- Evaluation of learning
- Ways to keep motivated

In addition, we have a role to play in helping colleagues to develop an awareness of how this can be done. In addition, we need to redefine the roles of SALCs and classrooms in our institutions and consider how they might overlap or intersect to best support learners.

In summary, environments are shifting, more learning opportunities are available, and all educators are being asked to promote learner autonomy. To respond we need to make sure our SALCs are social hubs where students naturally come for social, emotional, and learning support.

Special Issue on Japan

In this special issue we can see how colleagues are responding to challenges in different institutions around Japan. The special issue contains three general papers, one book review and one conference summary edited by Hisako Yamashita, as well

as three papers that form the seventh and final part of the language learning spaces column edited by Katherine Thornton.

General papers

The first paper was contributed by Simon Cooke, who is based at Tohoku Institute of Technology. The author takes the language classroom as the context in which to engage learners in reflection and self-evaluation. The language classroom is an appropriate place to start, particularly as students have not yet engaged in self-access learning and will need support in developing autonomous learning skills. In this pilot study, the author describes tasks where learners watch and discuss online videos in English, reflect on their performance and set goals for improving their language skills. The author provides insights from the research investigating learners' responses to these tasks.

The second paper is a report focussed on providing writing support in Japan by Shawn Andersson and Maho Nakahashi from Osaka University. The authors summarise some features of well-established facilities in the United States before making recommendations for their own institution and the Japanese context.

The third paper by Parisa Mehran, Mehrasa Alizadeh, Ichiro Koguchi, and Haruo Takemura, also at Osaka University, is the result of an in-depth needs analysis assessing Japanese undergraduate students' needs in order to provide self-access support for them. The authors provide practical guidelines for establishing a centre that support autonomous language learning based on a comprehensive review of various facilities in Japan.

Reviews

The reviews section edited by Hisako Yamashita contains one book review and one conference summary. *Social spaces for language learning: Stories from the L-café* was edited by Garold Murray and Naomi Fujishima and is reviewed here by Anthony DiGiulio from Kanda Institute of Foreign Languages in Tokyo. DiGiulio describes the three parts of the book in detail and suggests that it a "must-read" for anyone considering creating social language learning space.

Michael P. Lin from Kobe Shoin, Konan, and Konan Women's Universities, Hyogo, Japan reports on the Japan Association for Self-Access Learning (JASAL) 2016 Annual Conference held on December 10, 2016 at Konan Women's University in Kobe, Japan. JASAL is a non-profit professional organization in its 12th year devoted to promoting self-access learning in Japan. The JASAL 2016 conference was

its second stand-alone event and attracted almost 100 participants from Japan and beyond.

Language Learning Spaces: Self-Access in Action

Katherine Thornton from Otemon Gakuin University in Osaka introduces the theme of the final instalment of the *Language Learning Spaces: Self-Access in Action* column with a useful commentary on some of the issues involved in evaluating self-access. The three contributions in the final instalment come from Daya Datwani-Choy from the University of Hong Kong (HKU); Katherine Thornton and Nao Noguchi from Otemon Gakuin University, Osaka; and finally my own contribution from Kanda University of International Studies, Chiba.

The Future of Self-Access in Japan

The contributions to this issue suggest that the field of self-access is thriving in Japan. Cooke's paper shows how preparation for autonomous self-access learning is beginning in the classroom; the papers by Andersson and Nakahashi, and Mehran et al., show the beginnings of new self-access facilities based on students' needs. The two reviews demonstrate engagement in scholarship and also a focus on community-building among Japan's self-access professionals. Finally, the column instalment demonstrates how institutions are taking evaluation and continued growth seriously. I hope this special issue will serve to inspire newcomers and veterans to the field within Japan and of course beyond. Feel free to get in touch if you would be interested in guest editing or contributing to a future issue focussing on a specific region of the world.

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Notes on the Editor

Jo Mynard is the founding editor of *SiSAL Journal*. She is an associate professor and the Director of the Self-Access Learning Centre at Kanda University of International Studies in Japan. She has been involved in facilitating self-access language learning since 1996.

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Engendering Autonomy and Motivation through Learner Reflection Tasks

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Abstract

This pilot study examines the perceived benefits of a self-evaluation activity by 73 Japanese university learners taking an elementary English conversation course. Participants were asked to watch online videos of English TED presentations, discuss their reactions to the videos in a group and then reflect on their individual speaking performances and listening skills after each group discussion using a retrospective self-evaluation form. Student comments indicated that the majority of learners perceived value in the process of identifying areas of weakness and in the prescribed task where they planned to improve on these areas. The preliminary findings support the use of self-evaluation and reflection tasks in second-language conversation courses to improve speaking and listening abilities and autonomous learning

Keywords: autonomy, motivation, reflection task, Japanese university

The context for this paper is a university in the Tohoku region of Japan. Students like the ones described in this paper often face challenges when developing oral communication skills. The author (also the instructor/researcher) sought to engage students in reflection and self-evaluation in order to foster learner autonomy and motivation for English language learning. Developing autonomy in the classroom may be a first step to promoting autonomous learning habits outside the classroom and in self-access environments. The paper provides details of the implementation of activities which offered opportunities for autonomous practice through group discussion and reflective practice. Along with details of the implementation of these activities, some feedback from students is also shared.

Autonomy and Learner Reflection

There may be a number of ways in which to approach research which seeks to examine student reactions to new learning methodologies. However, in this study, the author will concentrate on how the activities appeared to foster

learner autonomy through self-evaluation, focussing in particular on student reactions to their participation in the activities.

For Benson (2011), autonomy and autonomous learning is “learning in which the learners demonstrate a capacity to control their learning” (p. 124) and in which autonomous behaviour is developed through practice in modes of learning which help to promote self-direction. Furthermore, Cooke and Leis (2015) argue it is important not to misinterpret autonomy as self-instruction or individualization whereby learners can determine their own needs and act upon these needs independently. Indeed, it is the teachers’ role to both understand and account for learners’ needs, in addition to creating activities which might help in the development of the autonomous learner. Thus, autonomy is defined in this paper as a “matter of learners doing things not on their own, but for themselves” (Little, 2007, p. 14).

In his paper which examined the value of self-evaluation through reflective practice, Cooke (2013) describes the concept and practice of self-evaluation as key in helping students to become more confident learners. According to Ushioda (2011), this idea of fostering motivation to participate in the construction of language, plays a vital role in the development of the autonomous learner as it allows students to examine possible avenues of learning strategies that best fit their preferred learning styles (Benson, 2011), offering them greater responsibility and control over their learning.

Allowing learners greater engagement in and responsibility for their learning, is seen as vital in the transition from a top-down to a more learner-centred approach. However, in handing over some areas of control to the learner, such as self-evaluation of proficiency, we are faced with a number of challenges. One is the introduction of autonomous practices to learners who may be more used to the prescriptive, top-down classroom. Indeed, as Benson advises, it is up to the teacher to “...help learners to confront their ideas about learning that lead them to resist the idea of autonomy” (2011, p. 108). Another challenge that may be encountered is one of simple objectivity. Learners might feel that they are expected to be improving in their L2 ability as the semester continues and so grade themselves accordingly, in a manifestation of demand characteristics, sometimes referred to as the Hawthorne effect (in which people are observed to modify their behaviour because they are being scrutinized). In an attempt to

reconcile these concerns, the tasks detailed in this study were designed to engage learners in speaking and reflection tasks in an enjoyable way. This pilot study sought to examine learners' reactions to the opportunities they were given to reflect and self-evaluate their English oral/aural skills.

Method

Context

The pilot study took place in a university L2 English conversation course. The course was an elective for first-year learners from a variety of disciplines. The class objectives as stated in the curriculum outline guide are to help learners improve their communication (speaking and listening) skills through a variety of textbook-based activities.

Participants

73 first-year students from two elective English conversation classes were chosen to participate in the study. The two classes were taught by the author.

Learner English levels

To gauge learners' current English skill levels (the university does not have a specific English levels test for incoming learners), the learners were administered with a self-perceived proficiency test taken from The CEFR-J (Tono & Negishi, 2012). The CEFR-J is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and has been adapted for the English language context in Japan. It consists of a series of 'can do' descriptors, which indicate what the test-taker can do with language. It is based upon the 'action-oriented approach' proposed in the original CEFR and has 12 levels based on the original six A1 to C2 levels found on the CEFR. A Cronbach's alpha was carried out using SPSS version 22 to assess the internal consistency between the CEFR can-do list of variables. The results demonstrated that all the variables are related and could therefore be equated as satisfactory indications of learners' self-perceived English proficiency (see table 1 below). The median score on the test for the learners in this study was A2.1, classed on the CEFR-J as 'First stage of basic proficiency'.

Table 1. Correlation Coefficients Between the CEFR-J Variables

Variable	Reliability
Listening	.854
Reading	.870
Speaking (conversation)	.912
Speaking (presentation)	.910

Note: All the correlations are significant at the $p < 0.01$ level (2-tailed)

Procedure

In addition to the textbook-based activities, class time was also dedicated to practicing English through a variety of pair and group-work activities, such as role-play and presentations. In addition, every third week of the course, starting in week three, 50 minutes of the 90-minute class were dedicated to learners watching one of six prescribed 5-6 -minute TED videos and writing comments about what they were watching on a teacher-created handout (see Appendix A). This part of the activity took 30 of the 50 minutes. After these 30 minutes had elapsed, learners were then asked to share the comments they had written regarding the video with previously assigned group members for 10 minutes. The remaining 10 minutes were assigned to learners assigning scores regarding their own speaking and listening performances during those two activities and writing comments regarding how they might address perceived weaknesses in these areas (Appendix B). This handout could be completed in Japanese if the learners wished to do so. For subsequent weeks in which the activity took place, learners were required to watch one of the prescribed videos they had not previously seen. The first two weeks of the course featured brief class tutoring practice sessions regarding both discussion and handout completion. These preparation sessions involved the whole class watching a video together, making groups, and using teacher-prepared discussion and conversation prompts that the learners could re-use for subsequent classes.

Question 5 on the form (Appendix A) asked learners to consider how they might improve upon speaking/listening performances. This question required specific and realistic written responses regarding how they would achieve the stated goals. An example of an acceptable response to this question is shown below:

I want to read my grammar book from high school. The title is (book title

here). I will read the section on conjunctions and do the exercises in the book about conjunctions.’

Learners were asked to keep the forms to be able to verify improvement over previous assigned speaking and listening performance scores and to check to see if they had completed the self-directed learning task(s) or not.

Data collection and analysis

After carrying out the activity four times during the course, learners’ were asked to give feedback via an open response form regarding the both the group discussion and the self-reflection parts of the activity. The comments were all written in Japanese. They were translated into English by the author and the translation checked by a proficient bilingual. Sixty-five (90%) of the learners offered comments of varying length. The comments were collated and divided into themes by the author. The comments were anonymous and students chose their own pseudonyms (which have been used in this paper).

Findings

Of the sixty-five comments received, just five percent referred to the activity in a negative way. As shown below, other negative opinions mainly focused on students’ perceptions of their own shortcomings in English, or the timing of the activity.

Theme 1: Relating to students sharing opinions in English with class members.

Yuta: Giving my opinion in English enabled me to improve my communication skill. I thought the discussion activity was really fun.

Cheese: It was great way to get to know new people.

While Yuta’s comment demonstrates what might be described as the ideal reaction to the class, Cheese’s comment also highlights another benefit to using the activity; a way of helping learners get to know each other through the discussion element of the activity.

The negative opinions from learners centred on their perceived communication weaknesses in English.

Shiorin: It was difficult to get the words out from inside my head.

In addition to practices aimed at improving learner confidence in using the L2, activities which look to enhance and embrace group learning, such as those found in Arnold, Dörnyei, and Pugliese (2015) could be implemented.

Theme 2: Relating to using English.

Keita: Little by little I felt English speaking becoming part of me.

Hatopan: I felt that I was able to make full use of the English I've learned up to now.

By asking learners to engage in authentic activities in the L2, i.e., in the exchange of ideas and opinions, comments such as these hint that reflective tasks can offer not only enjoyment in the curriculum content but also engagement with material that hints at life applications (King, Newman, & Carmichael, 2009). In light of the views expressed by Ryan (2009) and others regarding the paucity of opportunities for English use in Japan, life application in this case means giving students the opportunities to learn something new and of interest from the videos shown and also through the opinions of their group, sharing interactions in no-risk cooperative turns.

The negative opinions in this theme related either to the content of the videos being too difficult or to learners feeling no improvement in their listening or speaking skills. In addition, Pelly's comment also demonstrates the challenges of asking learners to engage with English for an extended period of time and therefore the need to introduce new materials and class methodology in a procedural fashion. A greater role by the teacher in this regard, one who might seek to intervene or offer their support for learners who appear to be 'treading water' in this way, might help to determine measures to aid these learners. This could be achieved by paying closer attention to the comments section of the feedback sheets after each session and/or checking for efficient functional group interaction and turn-taking during the discussion period of the activity.

N: I think my listening improved but I don't really think my speaking did.

Nade: I don't think my level changed.

Pelly: It was really hard to speak in English for all that time.

Theme 3: Relating to students overcoming challenges.

Whilst learning need not necessarily be perceived as being fun, it should certainly be engaging (Wentzel & Brophy, 2014). Furthermore, the creation of an atmosphere which can enhance intrinsic motivation is deemed necessary to foster motivated, autonomous learners (Fukuda, Sakata, & Takeuchi, 2011). Many of the positive opinions stated related to the amount of English that the learners were asked to pay attention to and to produce. For many of them, this seemed to be an enjoyable challenge:

Rippi: It was hard but I was able to come into contact with a lot of English.

Itonoko: Every time I come to the lesson each week, I can feel my English improving.

The negative opinions given here carried none of the contrasting conjunctions found in many of the positive statements. A longer period of scaffolding for the activity including the teaching of effective listening and discussion strategies could benefit learners struggling with the activity.

Pancake: It was really hard.

Theme 4: Regarding self-evaluation.

As can be seen in the remarks below, the majority of learners spoke of the act of verification of changes in their English skills in very positive ways. The comment by Pancake is revealing here as he/she speaks highly of the activity in necessitating the use of English despite their earlier comment found in Theme 3 that they found the activity difficult.

Red: I feel like I can sense the improvement I make and that is motivating.

Takeyan: I was able to really feel a sense of achievement and change in skill when checking my previous score.

Pancake: I could use English much more than before.

The negative comments centred on learners either being unable to sense any changes or, as noted below, a noticing of their scores decreasing. Picking up on the negative trends of these learners at an early stage could help the teacher to offer assistance, such as helping to redefine short-term student goals, to ward off demotivating trajectories.

Kimura: I wasn't able to see much change from week to week.

Cheese: My level kept going up and down. I couldn't understand it.

Theme 5: Regarding students setting their own study plans.

As shown in the comments below, learners appeared to recognize their weaknesses and most spoke of the perceived value of the opportunity to act upon them.

N: I was able to check and pinpoint my weak points and see what I needed to work on.

Sayumiso: I was able to plan what I needed to work on for next time.

The negative opinions mostly related to the learners' inability to find the time to address their weaknesses.

Carbon: I was so busy with other classes that I couldn't do the work that I set myself.

Theme 6: Regarding desire to do the activity again.

The positive comments allotted to this theme justify the inclusion of such an activity even for learners who, as has been observed in some of the comments above, are not used to its type.

Blacksmith: I really wish that there were other English classes like this.

Takeyan: As not many other English classes offer the chance to speak so much, I wish there were classes like this that let you have contact with English in the same way.

The negative opinions focused mainly on the fact that this was a class that took part in the final university period of the day and on the overall difficulty of the activity.

Water: It was a 5th period class and so it was tiring!

Yu: It was fun but difficult.

Conclusion

The findings of this preliminary study suggest that the handing back of some control through the implementation of reflective practice is highly valued by learners and is perceived as instrumental in fostering motivation and playing a role in their English improvement. In this way, it supports the findings of other studies into the value of reflective practice and the development of autonomous practices through reflection to enhance students' English abilities (Cooke, 2013; Werner, 2014). In addition, the comments suggest that value was placed in the perceived benefit of learners sharing their opinions in the L2. Despite the novelty of the activity and the placing of more responsibility in the hands of the learner, the relatively small number of negative comments relating to its difficulty suggest that the implementation of such an activity was not excessively demanding. As recommended by Benson (2011), Wentzel & Brophy (2014) and others, for motivated learning to occur, teachers must provide sufficient scaffolding to enable learners to be able to perceive the benefits that the adoption of autonomous practices such as reflective practice might bring. The positive comments reveal

value in pursuing a more comprehensive study into the use of activities that promote learner reflection tasks.

Limitations

The variety of the comments and indeed the implementation of a study such as this suggests potential for rewarding further investigation from a number of perspectives, including student anxiety, peer evaluation and feedback, which could each reveal valuable reflections on the value of the activities. Future iterations of this study will primarily seek to implement a questionnaire which can focus on just one or two of these fields to greater inform the research.

The instructor made efforts to encourage students to write in detail regarding their perceived weaknesses and their proposed study plans to address these weaknesses, in order to create suitable guidelines for autonomous study. However, student responses were found to be rather vague in a small number of cases. Clearer instruction in this area would encourage more elaborate details regarding the extent to which these tasks had been completed, possibly helping learners to better pinpoint areas for improvement. Future extensions to the study could include a more thorough investigation into what extent the self-prescribed self-study (and indeed what other additional study) was carried out by the learners would be beneficial in defining optimum realistic and effective study plans. By the same token, examination of methods used by learners pre/during/post activity could be made available as hints and guidelines for other less-able learners.

Notes on the Contributor

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Appendices

Appendix A

Handouts Showing Video Selection and Discussion Activity Print

Discussion

Matt Cutts: Try something new for 30 days

マット・カツの30日間チャレンジ

https://www.ted.com/talks/matt_cutts_try_something_new_for_30_days?language=ja

<http://tinyurl.com/moyu4fe>

Jay Walker: The world's English mania

ジェイ・ウォーカーが語る世界の英語熱

https://www.ted.com/talks/jay_walker_on_the_world_s_english_mania?language=ja

<http://tinyurl.com/lhhoato>

Kenneth Shinozuka: My simple invention, designed to keep my grandfather safe

祖父の身を守るための僕のシンプルな発明

https://www.ted.com/talks/kenneth_shinozuka_my_simple_invention_designed_to_keep_my_grandfather_safe?language=ja

<http://tinyurl.com/og2785g>

Graham Hill: Why I'm a weekday vegetarian

ウィークデイベジタリアン（週5日の菜食主義）のすすめ

https://www.ted.com/talks/graham_hill_weekday_vegetarian?language=ja

<http://tinyurl.com/o9tjjwa>

Sebastian Thrun: Google's driverless car

Googleの自動運転車で目指していること

https://www.ted.com/talks/sebastian_thrun_google_s_driverless_car?language=ja

<http://tinyurl.com/kvcjayh>

Graham Hill: Less stuff, more happiness

ものは少なく、幸せは多めに

https://www.ted.com/talks/graham_hill_less_stuff_more_happiness?language=ja

<http://tinyurl.com/pt645sd>

1. Make a group
2. Choose one of the TED talks.

3. Watch the TED talk for 30 minutes. You can re-start the video as often as you want. Your teacher will tell you when to stop watching.

While you are watching, write the answers to these questions. You can write in Japanese.

A. What was the title of the presentation? Why did you choose it?

D. Was the presentation interesting? Why/Why not? What was the most interesting part?

E. Would you recommend others to watch it? Why/why not?

F. What 5 words of vocabulary did you learn?

4. Now discuss your answers to the above questions with your group.

5. How did you do? Complete the self-evaluation form over the page.

Appendix B

Student Self-Assessment and Feedback Sheets

自分に点数を付けて下さい:

Listening	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Speaking	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

1. Did my score improve over last time? Why/why not?

前回のスコアよりも上がりましたか？なぜですか？なぜそうでもないですか？

Did I carry out number 3? 前回のこのプリントの3番の活動(弱点の改善)はしましたか？

yes の場合：どうでしたか？効果的でしたか？

no の場合：なぜですか？

2. What do I need to improve?

自分の弱点はなんですか？

3. How am I going to do that?

2週間後までその弱点を改善する為に何をしますか？

Discovering Methods of Bettering our Writing Desk: A Report on Visits to US University Writing Centers

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Abstract

English writing centers in Japan are a somewhat new phenomenon. The purpose of this study was to gain a perspective of actual operations of writing centers abroad. We visited the English writing centers of three universities in California with well-established, large centers to get a perspective of the day-to-day operations and best practices on how to run a writing center. The universities that we visited include the Hume Center for Writing and Speaking at Stanford University; the University of California, Berkeley Student Learning Center; and the University of California, Davis Student Academic Success Center.

Keywords: US universities, Japan English writing centers, higher education

Introduction

With the future prospect of the world becoming more globalized and interconnected, it becomes necessary for Japanese students to have the ability to share their research results with the rest of the world through such means as international conferences and research papers. Even if research demonstrates outstanding results, it would have no meaning to the rest of the world if it were not appropriately expressed in English. This issue has become a reality for Japanese students, and there is a real struggle in this regard. Given this situation, there is a significant need to provide English writing support at Japanese universities. If students can gain the support they need to better their writing skills in English, it will promote not only more sophisticated theses, but it will also motivate students to be confident and positive towards global interactions. Students in universities with access to frequent writing support can gain the necessary competencies to lead in the international society.

Even though writing centers have only recently been implemented in Japan since 2004 as a means to supplement Japanese students' writing capabilities, the first writing centers started in the United States during the 1930's (Williams & Severino, 2004). In Japan, there are now over 15 university writing centers, and their popularity keeps rising. However, there have been some startup issues. For instance, Japanese English writing centers have had trouble attracting users through advertising (Johnston, Yodisha, & Cornwell, 2010). It is also hard to find a single approach to operating writing centers, as each center differs from each

other and follows their own university needs within the available budget (Johnston, Yodisha, & Cornwell, 2010). There is even debate regarding the teaching methods that should be employed. Originally, it was believed that all writing centers should copy the US model of trying to guide students instead of acting as their proofreaders (Shamoon & Burns, 1995). However, researchers are now starting to believe that the US model can only be used as a guide, and cannot be directly imported into Japan.

With the above issues in mind, we expressed a goal of increasing the English research output ability of engineering students by opening our Writing Help Desk in 2015 within the School of Engineering at Osaka University. The purpose of establishing the desk was to allow us to address the individual strengths and weaknesses of each student, which would otherwise be difficult to accomplish through group learning methods such as class lectures. Since its opening, the desk has been very popular and is adding a lot of value to the students' university experiences. However, the Writing Help Desk has experienced various problems with the available budget, scheduling for tutors, location, effective advertising and general management. Currently, the desk is small, but due to its importance and the significant needs of Japanese students, we are now searching for a way to expand in the future.

We wanted to get a better fundamental idea on how to run a writing center and unique ways of thinking about best practices. Given that the United States was the birthplace of writing centers, we chose to visit three famous universities within California with well-established centers. We contacted each of the centers, and our visits were accommodated in August of 2016. After touring the facilities, we were able to sit down with and interview the staff.

While much of the current research has focused on the teaching methods of writing centers, the purpose of this report was to focus on two criteria: First, we wanted to look at management and administration practices regarding staffing, reserving, offered services and ways of advertising and promoting the centers. Second, we wanted to observe and question the center staff regarding unique strategies, special approaches and perceived purpose. The contents of this report include observations by the authors that were made throughout the tours, and do not necessarily constitute as official policies of the universities.

The Hume Center for Writing and Speaking, Stanford University

The Hume Center for Writing and Speaking at Stanford University is centrally located in the middle of campus in the historical section. It opened in 2001 as the result of a merger of the writing and speaking centers together into one single center. Previously, the locations

of the departments were difficult to find. The facilities consist of a two-story building with several small to medium-sized rooms where sessions are conducted. These rooms were designed for the purpose of providing students with a more comfortable feeling and sense of privacy that comes from having one session per room rather than multiple sessions occurring together.

Each of the small rooms is furnished to have multiple accommodations including a large mounted television monitor to connect to computers. This is to provide a more interactive experience instead of both the tutor and tutee staring down the whole time at printed copies. The monitors, along with video cameras, also play an important role in helping with presentation sessions; the television can display the presentation slides while the sessions are recorded to provide feedback for later. The walls of each room are made of corkboard and whiteboards, allowing the students to write and tack papers on the walls for essay brainstorming.

The center provides various writing services for research, classes and even outside assistance for things like job-hunting applications. Staff are willing to help students with almost any type of writing support that they need. For speaking sessions, the center usually assists with public speaking presentations. The writing sessions are reserved for 30-minute sessions, while speaking sessions are 45 minutes long. However, students have the option of booking a double slot to make the sessions longer if needed.

Besides the individual small rooms, there is also a larger room that doubles as the Cafe and Drop-in area. The intention of this room is to provide a relaxing environment as seen in a real cafe with comfortable chairs. Students can come in for drop-in tutoring assistance, or they can just relax and write by themselves. Should they have a question, a tutor can be there to assist them. While most of the time this room is used for drop-in tutoring services, there are other times where the staff hold events to celebrate writing and speaking excellence with awards ceremonies for top speeches or essays.

Most of the students that are using the writing center are undergraduates, with occasional graduate and PhD students attending as well. Remarkably, the center services around a quarter of the entire undergraduate student population every year. In addition to the writing and speaking sessions, the center also frequently holds workshops with themes ranging from public speaking to writing methods for setting up arguments, brainstorming and more.

To reserve sessions, there is an online booking system where students can choose their own tutor, usually within their same major. Students are actually encouraged to try

different tutors at first, and once they find a tutor that they like, they can set up reoccurring sessions to meet on certain days every week. This allows the tutors to be familiar with the students' work and encourage them to keep returning. Reoccurring sessions can only be reserved one month in advance, but can be extended month-to-month.

The writing center tutors consist of both current Stanford University students for drop-in writing and speaking services, and well as professionals who provide appointment-based writing services. Hiring takes place once a year, and the tutors spend one quarter going through a training class. The department tries to hire for all majors so that there will always be someone with the appropriate knowledge for tutees.

At the time of applying, tutors choose their preference in becoming either writing or speaking tutors, and attend a training session based on this after being hired. Training sessions include learning about writing or speaking methods, and how not to be biased among other things. The tutors receive college credit for attending the training sessions, and training continues throughout the quarter through periodic workshops. The center eventually wants to offer tutors the opportunity to conduct both writing and speaking sessions in the near future, but this will require additional initial training time.

With regards to advertising, the Hume Center creates brochures to hand out and engages in social media. However, the main method of advertising is through word of mouth and partnerships with the faculty. It is imperative for the center to get the faculty to believe in the services so that they can promote the center. The Hume Center staff is invited by professors to visit their classes often where they hand out the brochures and free pens while talking about the center's services. Many faculties also put information about the Hume Center in their syllabi. Additionally, the Hume Center partners with the Undergraduate Advising and Research (UAR) department whose purpose is to help students choose their classes. The department often talks about the Hume Center when meeting with students. However, the Hume Center makes an effort to try not to compel students to use their services. Instead, they want the students to come on their own free will.

A current issue that the center is having is in regards to some students not using their services because they believe that a peer student working as a drop-in writing tutor cannot help them with their essay. Conversely, some students may be intimidated by the appointment-based tutors with high credentials. The center staff addresses this by trying to humanize the tutors by posting 'Tutors of the Week' articles on their social media page. They also portray their tutors as people that want to help them with their essay and not judge or tell them what they are doing wrong.

When it comes to the Hume Center's approach for tutoring, they promote the idea that they are there to guide students, but not there to be editors. Each tutor is trained to recognize and handle situations where students are treating tutors like editors. Additionally, the center tries to act as coaches, not judges. In this way, they are there to help students improve their English, not discourage or embarrass them. Students are not able to submit their work in advance for the center to check ahead of time. One reason for this is because it is hard to determine how long it will take a tutor to edit these. But more importantly, they want to promote a learning environment with active sessions and provided feedback instead of just explaining mistakes. They focus on the guidelines of literature called "Talk About Writing", which promotes students to think critically and build confidence through teaching rather than telling.

As a means to evaluate its performance, the Hume Center is assessed entirely based on its usage. This means that the more students that participate, the more it shows that they are doing a good job and that their services are meaningful. Questionnaires are used to help the tutors get feedback, and students are asked to fill out a form when they finish each session.

UC Berkeley Student Learning Center

The UC Berkeley Student Learning Center assists over 7,000 students each year with over 2 million transactions. It has been serving students for over 20 years, and tutoring takes place mostly in a single, large open room with additional private rooms for particular needs. The Learning Center's services are solely for undergraduates only, as there is another center available for graduate students and above.

The sessions are set at 50-minute timeframes, and include all forms of tutoring from writing, math, science and engineering. The staff also periodically hold various workshops on common mistakes. While students are not able to choose their tutors using the normal services, they can sign up for scheduled weekly sessions with the same tutor that are arranged for entire quarters at a time.

The tutors all consist of currently enrolled students with various majors in the abovementioned disciplines. There are also a couple coordinators who work underneath the director who are responsible for putting together the workshops, managing tutor scheduling and training sessions and working on innovation plans for the center. Training sessions for the tutors include practice sessions and reviewing literature about writing centers. They also

focus on avoiding things like racial profiling and stereotyping. Grammar training is done as well, but this plays less of a role than being able to create clear ideas.

The center's performance is evaluated on several aspects including the number of visitors they receive and the results of exit surveys for each session. They also have the ability to track students' grade changes over time to show how much of an impact the center is having on academic performance.

With regards to teaching approaches, we discussed their concerns to address a wide gap between so-called 'disadvantaged' students who struggle with English writing, and 'advantaged' students that have little difficulties putting their thoughts into essays. As a means to try and bridge this gap, the center has several approaches in the way they look at writing betterment. These include stressing that writing can be considered a social activity where people should talk about their ideas with others. Also, they try to focus on tutoring as a means of making students better at writing instead of fixing deficiencies. Finally, they are currently trying to reach out to students whose native language is not English. This is because the population of international students has significantly increased in the last few years. And when helping these students, they focus on not treating their multilingualism as a disadvantage, but as an advantage.

Like the Hume Center at Stanford University, the Learning Center follows the approach that the tutors are not editors. Documents are not usually submitted ahead of time because they want to make the students independent writers as apposed to just giving them the answers. This is also too challenging to manage logistically. However, an exception to this is for students that sign up for the weekly reoccurring sessions, and the tutors are also able to track the students' progress over time and provide feedback on reaching goals.

Lastly, the center's current challenges include getting the students to get excited about and engaged in writing, and not just coming in to get their paper corrected. They are also trying to boost their attendance rates at the workshops that they host. To overcome these issues, they believe outreach to faculties is important and that creating partnerships is key. They are also considering enlisting a communication assistant to work on social media advertising.

UC Davis Student Academic Success Center

The UC Davis Student Academic Success Center offers a variety of services for undergraduate students who need assistance with such things like writing, math, science and engineering. For writing, they have drop-in writing services with several tutors on duty at any

given time during business hours. On average, about 80 drop-in sessions are being conducted each day, and most of the students using their services speak English as a second language.

Sessions are scheduled for 30 minutes at a time, but students can rebook as many times as they want per day depending on availability. Students can get assistance for many types of English writing ranging from general essays to help on personal statements for getting accepted into a college program. There is also weekly reoccurring tutoring where students meet twice a week and set this up once a quarter. When a student does not make it to the appointment, or if there is downtime, the tutors create learning materials.

Tutors are hired once a year and consist of currently enrolled students at the university. The tutoring position is very competitive with hundreds of applications being submitted, and the center proactively searches for students who demonstrate excellence in writing-related classes and asks them if they want to become tutors. They have an essay test as part of interview process and then do a mock tutoring session. The training for the tutors runs two times a week for the first quarter. Students are paid for the training, but are not given class credits. In addition to the initial training regime, they also have specialists who sit in on tutoring sessions to take notes and provide feedback.

Along with the part-time tutors, there are several fulltime specialists that usually have PhDs in their field of expertise. They too hold 30 minute, appointment-based sessions, and also teach some support classes. Additionally, the center has a few tutor coordinators that are in charge of coordinating hiring and scheduling for all of the tutors.

We observed an emphasis on the importance of bringing tutors and specialists back together after they are finished with training to share best practices and exchange ideas on a regular basis. This can be seen in group events such an exchange class held once a month to for specialists to voluntarily join. Collaboration also takes place once a quarter between the Academic Success Center and the Masters degree writing center.

To advertise their services, the center has handouts and bookmarks that they give to students. Also, a quarter of all students must take a particular entry-level writing course, and the center visits this class to talk about the center. They also have connections to the school library where they post their advertisements on the walls. They sometimes even send the center's specialists directly to various departments where students are struggling in order to hold office hours and be available for assistance. Finally, proactive analytics are used to assist them in finding students who are at risk of dropping out of the university to reach out to them directly.

Instead of relying on surveys as a means to judge the center's performance, surveys are usually only filled out when the students have something important or particular to say. Usage of the center is an important way to evaluate their performance. The center also runs extensive analytical research on the students' grade changes over time after they use their services.

Summary of Ideas/Suggestions

We received some helpful ideas by visiting the three centers, and we can hopefully use some of them to apply to our Writing Help Desk to add more value. As mentioned already, writing centers differ from one another, and they are changed depending on the needs of the university and the allotted budget. While our budget is nowhere near these writing centers', some of their fundamental approaches can still be considered.

In regards to advertising, getting faculty on board and engaged through partnerships was very important. Additionally, it was important to relay the message that the writing centers are not only for people who struggle with English, but everyone can benefit from their services.

In terms of focus, we saw an emphasis on creating writers out of students and not just correcting their papers. Centers can try to give the students the tools to be able to complete essays on their own. However, the debate on how to actually accomplish this is still ongoing. Creating a comfortable environment for the students to enjoy and getting them excited about writing was important to Stanford University. UC Berkeley saw writing as a social process where students do not have to be alone when they write; they can instead meet with tutors to brainstorm together.

With regards to evaluating the performance of centers, surveys appear to be the easiest way for assessing how a writing center is doing. A more sophisticated method is to use a computerized sign in system for when students check in to each session. By swiping student ID cards, additional information can be collected fast and can result in greater benchmarking through analysis. Center staff can also identify which students are at risk of failing or really need to catch up on English skills and reach out to them. Stanford University relied on surveys and usage for their benchmarking, while UC Davis and UC Berkeley implement computerized analyses as well to draw correlations between attending writing center sessions and the effects on grades over time.

Administratively, all three Writing Centers were managed in different ways but with some similarities. Employing current students to be the tutors was key to filling employee

positions, and a couple advisors working under a director are in charge of scheduling, hiring and workshops. Unfortunately, in Japan there are fewer native English speakers to choose from amongst student populations, and many Japanese writing centers must therefore hire students majoring in English to be the tutors. Employing international exchange students is an option, but all three of the California universities hired just once a year, and there is a dilemma raised regarding either hiring only long-term exchange students, or managing the logistics of frequently rehiring. Once hired, training for tutors could consist of a quarter-long class, and can be seen as an ongoing process thereafter with the addition of having meet-ups for tutors to exchange best practices.

Conclusion

As we also discovered at UC Berkeley, a gap exists between 'advantaged' and 'disadvantaged' students in that some students can communicate in English effortlessly, while others must struggle to catch up. For Japan, it is important to close this gap so that by the time students graduate, they are able to publish papers in English, participate in international conferences or be capable of conducting international business. Students can use writing centers as a means to meet these demands as a supplemental service to increase their English academic writing skills and gain the tools that they need to succeed.

Through the visits to the established writing centers, we learned that there is a focus on instilling the ability for students to observe and judge their own academic writing skills while getting them have a positive attitude towards writing. By using the writing centers, students can gain an understanding of their actual English writing level, and therefore gain more of an understanding of themselves. Through this, they are not simply gaining English ability; they are obtaining a deeper recognition of the thought processes that go into writing and logical thinking.

On the world stage, providing research results and taking a significant role in academia or society can lead to great results, but this requires the proper English writing skills to be able to interact with most of the world. Going forward, we hope to continue and expand our writing desk, which will require us to address issues such as the budget and operations long term. But we feel the desk is adding value through its ability to address individual needs, and as the significance is increasingly understood and recognized in Japan, we predict that there will be a continued gradual growth of writing centers being opened. With this increase, further research on effective writing methods and ways to run writing

centers will play a larger role. Therefore, the collaboration of academic research in conjunction with practical studies can lead to positive results.

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The Need for Establishing an English Self-Access Center at Osaka University: Practical Suggestions and Guidelines

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Abstract

As part of a PhD project, an in-depth needs analysis was carried out to assess the English language needs and difficulties of undergraduate Japanese EFL learners at Osaka University. The results were primarily intended to guide the design and development of an online English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) course. The findings further revealed a pressing need for launching and maintaining self-access language learning facilities which could provide learners with independent and semi-guided learning opportunities addressing their needs and interests. In this paper, the importance of establishing a self-access language learning center at Osaka University will be proposed with the goal of fostering learner autonomy. In fulfilling this objective, practical suggestions and overall guidelines will be outlined based on a number of language learning center observations in Japan. It is hoped that this writing will serve as a stimulus to strengthen the status of English language teaching at Osaka University.

Keywords: self-access language learning (SALL), self-access language learning center (SALLC), needs analysis

Self-Access Language Learning Centers (SALLCs)

Self-Access Language Learning (SALL) is an individualized form of learning which can take place within a variety of settings ranging from controlled (e.g., classrooms) to uncontrolled (e.g., cafeterias) learning environments (Gardner & Miller, 1999; 2011). Centers for providing SALL opportunities, known as Self-Access Language Learning Centers (SALLCs), have been, and continue to be, established over years around the world to empower students by helping them experience autonomous, independent, self-directed, and flexible learning. Numerous studies on SALL (to name a few, Gardner & Miller, 1997; Koyalan, 2009) have indicated that students learn best through the self-access mode anywhere, anytime, anyhow, at their own pace and convenience.

SALLCs have traditionally been regarded as physical spaces with language learning resources which can be accessed by learners (e.g., Sheerin, 1989). However, their physical

boundaries are far more difficult to identify with the incorporation of digital technology breaking the barriers of time and space as well as the integration of self-access learning into formal courses (Gardner, 2011).

Reinders (2012) has pointed out a number of misconceptions surrounding SALLCs and their features and functions. First, SALLCs are different from teacher-centered language labs or specialized libraries in that although they contain a large bulk of resources, they place more emphasis upon supporting the learning process rather than solely providing information. Another misconception about self-access language learning is that it is identical to self-study. Despite the indubitable fact that individual learning plays a pivotal role in this process, most SALLCs provide ample opportunities for individual and collaborative learning experiences.

SALLCs serve a complementary, rather than alternative, function (Gardner & Miller, 1999). According to Ingram (2001), these centers are not directly involved with the development of language education policy since policy choices often tend to be shaped by governments or ministries of higher education. Such centers also function independently and have no intention of replacing foreign language departments which are in charge of offering credit courses as mandated by curriculum. In fact, the institutions of higher education establish SALLCs in order to enhance the efficiency of their language education. In such cases, there is a tendency on the part of those institutions to detach themselves from traditional approaches (e.g., the grammar-translation method) so as to place more emphasis on developing higher levels of linguistic and cultural proficiency as well as to ensure career success through focusing on vocational language skills. Such a strategy oftentimes aids foreign language departments in pursuing academic, curriculum-based goals while helping students practice their language skills beyond the borders of the classroom through accessing SALLCs.

SALLCs in Japanese Higher Education

SALLCs have been set up in universities all over Japan in recent years. The Japan Association for Self-Access Learning (JASAL) has been remarkably active in encouraging and sustaining SALL and learner autonomy in Japan since 2005 by supporting SALL projects and organizing self-access related discussion groups, events, talks, and conferences. Moreover, *SiSAL Journal* (Studies in Self-Access Learning) began publishing quarterly in 2010 through the SALC at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS), Chiba, Japan (<http://www.kandagaigo.ac.jp/kuis/salc/index.html>). This center has been a pioneering leader

in lifelong language learner autonomy over a decade in Japan and is regarded as one of “the most effective” SALLCs (Hill & Tomlinson, 2013, p. 434). As Mach (2015) remarks, SALLCs are now highly prevalent among Japanese universities with a range of facilities from least resourced to best resourced as universities compete hard for attracting students whose number has been dropping year by year in present Japan.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the benefits yielded by SALLCs within Japanese universities, the researchers visited a number of such centers including the ones at Kindai University (formerly known as Kinki University), Tamagawa University, Kwansei Gakuin University, Ritsumeikan University, and Kobe College. In what follows, the diversity of resources and the modes of support provided by SALLCs at Kindai University and Tamagawa University are described in detail due to their prominence in Japan.

Kindai University English Village

The English Village (Eigo Mura, 英語村), also known as E³ (e-cube), was established in 2006 at the university’s main campus located in Osaka (<http://www.kindai.ac.jp/e-cube/>). The center is said to have an average of 700 student visits per day. Apart from ensuring access to learning resources which is typical of SALLCs, E³ regularly organizes various seasonal activities to further engage learners, such as cultural events about different countries and holding parties. There is also a basketball court and a café as part of E³ so as to immerse the students into an interactive English-only environment.

All the first-year undergraduate students at Kindai University are obliged to visit E³ at least four times within a year to get the required stamps on their passports (Figure 1). There are other rewards and badges given to the students to encourage them to visit the center, for instance getting a stamp known as a visa by talking to native speaking teachers for ten minutes. Although the SALLC at Kanda University has a more consolidated status in terms of research robustness and expertise, the English Village at Kindai University has also been frequently featured in the media and press.

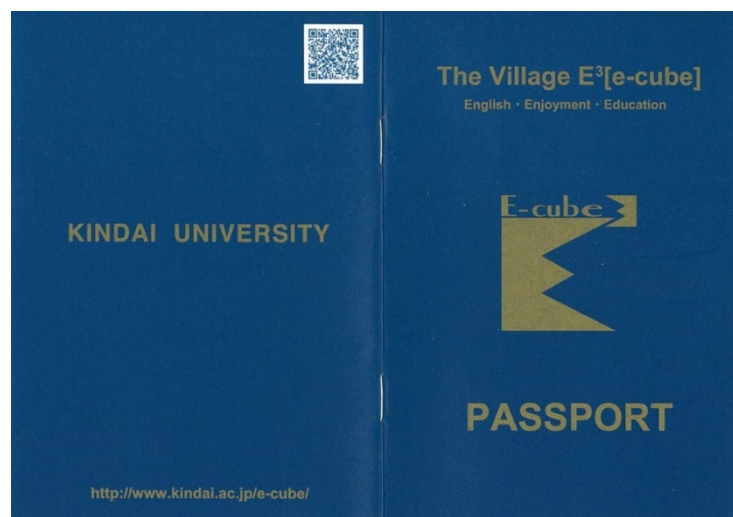


Figure 1. The Village E³ (e-cube) Passport Cover Page

Tamagawa University Center for English as a Lingua Franca

The Center for English as a Lingua Franca (CELF) at Tamagawa University in Tokyo (<http://www.tamagawa.ac.jp/celf/>) is in charge of providing campus-wide English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) programs for most of the departments at this university. In a building known as “ELF Study Hall 2015”, the students have access to modern facilities such as the [Active Learning Zone](#) and the [Self Study Zone](#) (the hyperlinks show the 360° panoramic view of the two zones). In addition, the instructors at this center are from various L1 backgrounds, which is aimed at exposing students to world Englishes. There is also a quotation by Widdowson on one of the walls of the Self Study Zone further highlighting the importance of learning ELF (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Tamagawa University Self Study Zone | Photo Taken by the Researchers

The Scenario at Osaka University

As part of a PhD project on designing, developing, and implementing an EGAP (English for General Academic Purposes) online course targeting Japanese undergraduate students, the researchers conducted interviews with several English language instructors and policy makers to investigate the challenges of English language teaching at Osaka University. The interviewees were asked about the types of extra-curricular activities or programs designed to support the students with limited English proficiency. Content analysis of the interviews revealed that there is no SALLC at Osaka University where students could foster their language skills beyond the borders of the classroom. There are, however, some programs to help students mainly with academic English and occasionally with conversational English which are described below:

Academic English Support Desk

Multilingual Expert Program (MLE), supported by the departments of humanities at Osaka University, offers various programs for 24 languages. With regard to the English language, MLE started the Academic English Support Desk Program (Figure 3) in 2015 to enhance students' academic presentation and writing skills. Students can individually consult with a native speaker to improve their academic performance.

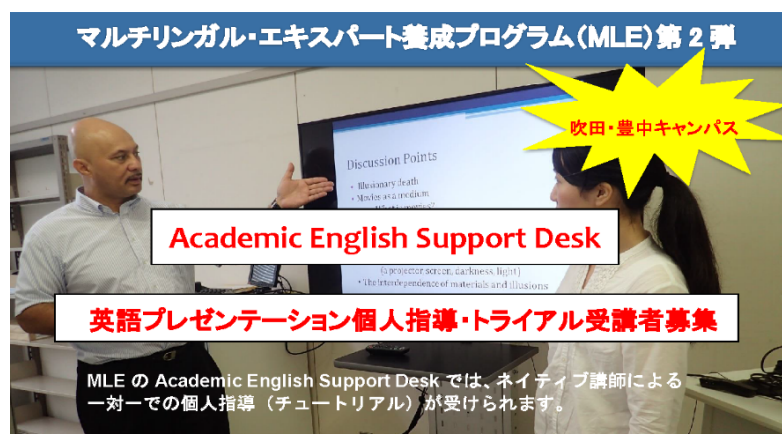


Figure 3. Academic English Support Desk, Osaka University
(source: http://www.mle.osaka-u.ac.jp/event/en_trial_suita_toyonaka.pdf)

Language Support Desk

The Center for International Affairs (CIA) at the Graduate School of Engineering, Osaka University has initiated a program entitled “Language Support Desk” (ランゲージサポートデスク) (Figure 4), which offers free English support to undergraduate and graduate

students of the School of Engineering. The activities of this center range from helping students in writing essays and articles, making PowerPoint slides, giving academic presentations and responding to questions, to improving their conversational and academic spoken English skills. CIA also holds English Movie Cafés once a week, open to all Osaka University students.



Figure 4. Language Support Desk, Osaka University
(source: <http://www.fsao.eng.osaka-u.ac.jp/lang/LanguageSupportDesk.pdf>)

Test preparation

Test preparation activities such as “IELTS One-day Seminar” (Figure 5) are often organized at Osaka University to familiarize students with different English language proficiency tests and provide them with the necessary tools and test-taking strategies to maximize their scores.

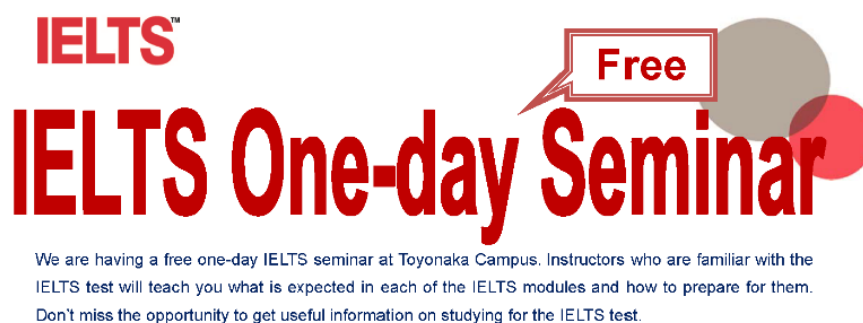


Figure 5. IELTS One-day Seminar, Osaka University
(source: <http://www.osaka-u.ac.jp/ja/news/event/2016/07/files/2IELTSOneDaySeminarJuly9English.pdf>)

Program for strengthening professional English skills

The International Student Affairs Division, Department of Education Promotion has recently started offering free speaking-oriented “Practical English Courses” (実践英語力強化講座) (Figure 6) for specific purposes covering social sciences, humanities, foreign studies, business communication, and medical sciences, in collaboration with Eiken Foundation of Japan and British Council. The courses provide opportunities for students to develop and strengthen their understanding of technical terminology and usage. “Study Abroad Preparation with Aptis” is another course with an emphasis on effective communication, preparing students to communicate confidently and efficiently in English when studying abroad and to perform successfully in the Aptis English test.



Figure 6. Program for Strengthening Professional English Skills, Practical English Courses, Osaka University
(source: http://www.osaka-u.ac.jp/ja/news/event/2016/02/files/20160217_11)

English Café

The Center for Education in Liberal Arts and Sciences (CELAS) has been organizing English Café (Figure 7) to help Japanese students practice their speaking skills at lunchtimes by creating a space where Japanese and international students can talk to each other in English about topics of their own interest in a casual environment. Apart from English, CELAS also holds similar cafés for other languages such as French, Spanish, German, Chinese, and Korean.



Figure 7. Multilingual Café, Osaka University

(source: <http://www.celas.osaka-u.ac.jp/forstudents/cafe/files/cafe282.pdf>)

Tandem Learning Project

Tandem Learning Project (タンデム学習プロジェクト) is run by the Faculty of Letters through a Facebook page (Figure 8), yet not limited to its students. The participants are paired up with a language partner who is a native or proficient speaker of the language they want to learn, which creates opportunities for mutual language exchange in a structured way.

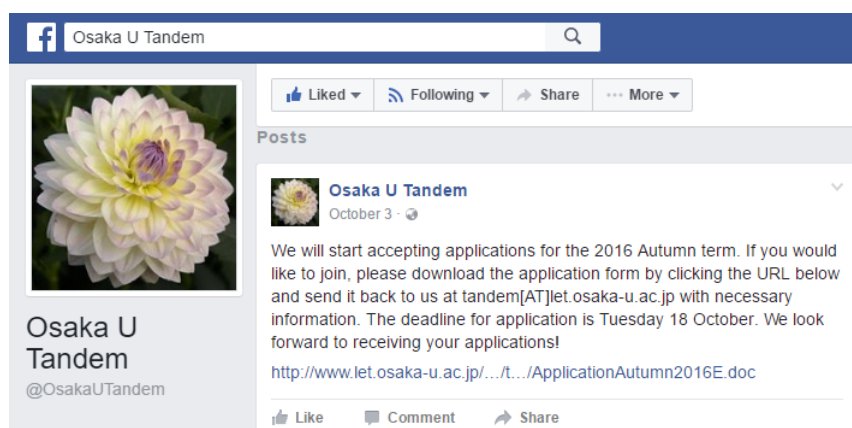


Figure 8. Tandem Learning Project, Osaka University

(source: <https://www.facebook.com/OsakaUTandem/?fref=ts>)

Others

The Center for the Advancement of Research and Education Exchange Networks in Asia (CAREN) and the Center for International Education and Exchange (CIEE) have held speech contests in English to encourage Japanese students to practice public speaking. In the last English speech contest (2016), for instance, the student participants were requested to

speak for five minutes about their ideas on how to help Osaka University shine on the international stage (Figure 9).



Figure 9. CAREN Speech Contest in English 2016, Osaka University
(source: <https://goo.gl/dPiVRD>)

Furthermore, the Education Planning Division also announced a call for ideas to improve the English proficiency of Osaka University students (Figure 10). The ideas collected through this initiative were open to public comments at the time of preparing this manuscript.



Figure 10. Call for Ideas to Improve English at Osaka University
(source: <http://www.fbs.osaka-u.ac.jp/jpn/board/docs/英語力強化ポスター.pdf>)

Practical Suggestions and Overall Guidelines

The following are some suggestions and guidelines for the establishment of a SALLC that have emerged from the researchers' SALLC visits and from the literature in the form of general and specific principles.

Cooker (2010) has identified a number of general principles associated with creating and maintaining SALLCs. First, SALLCs should be truly self-accessed, meaning that students should be allowed to access them on a voluntary basis rather than as part of their course of study. The second principle concerns involving learners in administrative roles, serving as a bridge between the student population and SALLC staff. Thirdly, fun and edutainment should be an integral feature of SALLCs due to the voluntary nature of self-access. Finally, the learning environment should be relaxing and visually appealing.

A set of more specific principles should be kept in mind in designing, managing, resourcing, and running a SALLC as discussed below.

Environment

The environment of a SALLC should be ambient so that students feel safe, relaxed, and comfortable to learn. Therefore, the physical layout, décor, furnishings, and amenities of the learning spaces are of utmost importance. To create an enticing atmosphere, it is typical to install a café or lounge style area within a SALLC. Dedicated learning spaces such as listening and speaking booths, study cubicles for individual or group learning, and reading and writing areas are recommended for a SALLC. It is worth noting that the geographic location of the center is also important to assure the ease of access (Mach, 2015).

Management

Successful management of a SALLC involves planning, efficient staffing, organizing extensive training, and managing human and physical resources. The manager is responsible for advancing the ultimate goal of a SALLC which is maximizing opportunities for autonomous learning. A veteran SALLC manager engages with various components including learners, teachers, materials, activities, equipment, and the learning environment (Gardner, 2011).

Facilities

Self-access materials should serve learners' needs, interests, and wants and provide them with more than what they receive from their credit courses (e.g., more variety, feedback, individual support). Self-access materials should also help learners become autonomous in order to be able to learn and discover the language independent of the materials. Moreover, self-access materials should be *access-self* meaning that learners should be involved as human beings, that is, their individuality should be taken into account in the learning process. Feedback should be provided in detail far more than answer keys as well. Furthermore, the tasks should be authentic and realistic. It is worth mentioning that students should be aware of what is available to them and how to access materials easily by being notified through promotional posters, catalogues, text messages, etc. In addition, a number of context-specific principles, for instance, age, gender, levels (Common European Framework of Reference can be a good standard), language learning purposes, and attitudes to SALL, should be considered (Tomlinson, 2010).

Among the facilities that can be offered at a SALLC especially in the context of Japan to gear to learners' interests are the following: Graded readers and audio books for extensive reading, exam preparation shelves such as TOEIC sample tests, magazines and translated English manga (Japanese comic books), movies and translated English anime (Japanese movie and television animation), music (karaoke boxes), games (edutainment booths), and so forth. CALL resources such as online sessions via Skype and Web 2.0 tools, as recommended by Kershaw et al. (2010), can be utilized, too. Language consulting services can be delivered online or onsite as well. The center can also arrange social events to increase interaction among the learners.

Pedagogical practices

Training learners (Gardner, 2001) for autonomy and independence is by far one of the most important pedagogical practices of any SALLC. Learners, in particular those with little experience in utilizing self-access materials, should be trained on how to make the best use of such resources. Moreover, teaching learners about study skills, language learning strategies, web searching tips, as well as self-assessment techniques enables them to further enhance their autonomous learning abilities. Integrating successful learning approaches such as collaborative, project-based learning could also help learners through the provision of scaffolding and peer support as they attempt to learn the target language by performing real-world tasks.

Looking Forward

SALLCs have a long tradition in institutes of higher education worldwide and in Japan. However, their mere presence cannot be the key to fostering self-directed learning. Training thus plays a pivotal role in assisting learners to take maximum advantage of self-access language learning materials. The administrators in charge of SALLCs are expected to provide resources and services matching students' needs and demands through conducting ongoing needs analyses. Finally, as remarked by Jones (1995), since autonomy is heavily influenced by cultural values, every SALLC should design its facilities and services with a full knowledge of its users and their cultural and educational backgrounds.

Osaka University, nonetheless, has not yet established its own SALLC, and the English support available to the students (explicated in Section 3) is not systematic or sustainable. Consequently, there is a strongly felt need for establishing a SALLC at this university, and the authors hope that this writing could act as an incentive for the university officials to fulfill this need.

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All the photos in this article are used with permission from their respective owners.

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Book Review: Social Spaces for Language Learning: Stories from the L-café Edited by Garold Murray and Naomi Fujishima

Reviewed by Anthony DiGiulio, Kanda Institute of Foreign Languages, Tokyo, Japan

Social spaces for language learning: Stories from the L-café describes the background, evolution and impact of the L-café, a social language learning space (SLLS) at Okayama University, Japan. This book is a must-read for anyone considering creating a similar space.

The book is structured into three sections containing chapters from administrators, teachers and students involved with the center in a variety of capacities. Murray and Fujishima, the editors, utilize narrative inquiry, a style of research which they define as documenting stories of lived experience and interpreting them in view of the literature. In the first section, administrators describe the decision to create the space, the planning, opening and running of the space. They also outline the growth and evolution of the space. The evolution came first via an expansion and then a relocation and shift in focus to all foreign languages, rather than just English. In this section, we receive detailed accounts of two separate managers, Uzuka in Chapter 3, and Fujimoto in Chapter 4, who each describe their management style and rationale for running things the way they did. In the second section, several teachers relate stories regarding the role that they played in the space, and in one case, what they used the space for (Lamitie in Chapter 5). In the final section, student users and student staff relate their experiences with the center and what it meant to them. Thus, by reading through the volume, the reader can experience second-hand the decision making, challenges and potential affordances provided by the space from the perspectives of actual stakeholders. In the final chapter, Murray and Fujishima utilize the literature, in particular, complexity theory, to tie together the experiences and explain many of the phenomena which come out in the narratives. They use this to create a provisional model for SLLSs which they believe should be considered when creating or managing such spaces.

The L-café, which began as the English Café in 2009 at Okayama University is described as a social learning space. The impetus for the creation of the space is attributed to the fact that Okayama University was chosen to become one of several “Super Global” universities by the Japanese government and received grants to accomplish this end. This also led to an increase in international students which several of the narratives report has played a large role in the success of the space. According to Murray and Fujishima, the defining feature of SLLSs is the focus on language learning through informal social interaction. This perhaps differs from most self-access centers which tend to focus on language learning through its materials, resources and/or services. For many self-access centers, the social aspect of learning is there but it may not be the main focus as it is here. The editors note that SLLSs are a relatively new type of facility and comparatively few in number. They also point out that research specifically focusing on SLLSs is sparse. Still, many of the services described in the text (a study abroad center, a writing center, a conversation lounge/partner system, among others) will be familiar to those working in self-access centers. It is, however, the distinct lack of traditional learning materials which sets these spaces apart. However, that is not to say that there are no resources. On the contrary, a common theme in the book which comes up again and again from different authors, is that the people are the learning resources at the L-café. They are the keys to the ultimate success or failure of the space.

Language policies and lack of adherence to these policies have been debated by those involved with running self-access centers for more than a decade. The L-café has no such policy. This was a deliberate choice in order to make it easier for Japanese students who are not confident in their abilities to enter. This theme of exclusivity or closedness is another important one which comes up throughout the book; another point of commonality with self-access centers. The presence of teachers, and perhaps more importantly, international students provide the opportunity to speak with natives and help to create diversity, reciprocity and neighbor interactions; all features which the editors include in their provisional model for SLLSs.

It is likely that different sections of the book will appeal to different people. Because the book tracks much of the center’s early development and points out many of the important decisions which needed to be made leading up to the creation of the space as well

as trouble spots and practical matters which needed consideration, the book may be particularly useful for individuals who are considering creating a similar facility or who are in the early stages of planning. For current practitioners or those who have been through this process, much will be familiar and may not provide many deep insights. The middle section of the book, devoted to teachers, may appeal to other teachers; primarily in helping them to understand what kind of place SLLSs are and may provide some ideas for those in management positions. For example, Lamitie in Chapter 5 relates his experience working in the L-café as a conversation partner and offers an awareness raising tip to increase student speaking time. In Chapter 6, Igarashi discusses setting up writing tutorials in the L-café and in Chapter 7, Fast discusses giving study abroad advice to students in the space. While still enjoyable to read, these chapters may be a bit too context-specific (Chapter 7) or too general (Chapter 6) to provide much to reflect on. The final section, devoted to the narratives of the students, illustrates how valuable and life-changing their experiences with the L-café have been. Again, while these accounts are interesting to read, it is somewhat of a ‘preaching to the choir’ exercise. However, as the narratives are written by the students and in their own words, they may be of great value in motivating and raising student awareness. In addition, the problems and affordances which came out of these narratives were likely to be extremely valuable in the formulation of Murray and Fujishima’s provisional model for SLLSs which they outline in the final chapter.

In many ways, running or working in a self-access center can be an isolating endeavor. Self-access centers are often viewed by administrators, teachers and likely a large proportion of the student body, as something of an unknown quantity in the sea of formal instruction which makes up most university and post-secondary campuses. This, compounded with the fact that the people involved with running these centers, are far fewer in number than their teacher counterparts, means that it is often difficult to get fresh ideas and perspectives from outside their day-to-day dealings. *Social Spaces for Language Learning* shines in this regard. Reading what are essentially written reflections of the various stakeholders involved with a slightly different type of space, allows the reader to reflect on their own practices. In this way, the book functions much the same way that reading reflective diaries do in many training programs and may just spark a change or a realization that there may be other ways of doing things. The narrative style of the text

lends to an enjoyable and highly comprehensible reading experience and the theoretical grounding provided by Murray and Fujishima in the final chapter ensure that the book will be of value to researchers and practitioners alike. Yes, there are some chapters which may not provide much to reflect on depending on the reader's experience. Still, the majority of the book is thought-provoking and will likely be an excellent starting point for those interested in SLLSs.

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Report on the Japan Association of Self-Access Learning (JASAL) 2016 Annual Conference

Michael P. Lin, Kobe Shoin, Konan, and Konan Women's Universities, Hyogo, Japan

Abstract

This article reports on the JASAL 2016 Annual Conference held on December 10, 2016 at Konan Women's University in Kobe, Japan. JASAL (Japan Association for Self-Access Learning) is a non-profit professional organization devoted to promoting self-access learning in Japan. The conference consisted of opening remarks by JASAL president Hisako Yamashita, a plenary talk by Dr. Jo Mynard, twenty oral presentations on various self-access learning topics, twelve poster presentations, and tours of the e-space, which is a self-access center at Konan Women's University. Ninety-five participants from over forty institutions attended. In this summary, the author reports on the day's events, featuring select presentations on SALC design, leadership, integration into curriculum, training, and lessons learned.

Keywords: self-access, design, leadership, integration, curriculum, training, lessons

The JASAL (Japan Association for Self-Access Learning) 2016 Annual Conference, held on Saturday, December 10, 2016 at Konan Women's University, was the second stand-alone conference by JASAL and was well-attended by 95 participants including teachers, administrators, and students from all over Japan and Asia. The conference sought to help directors, teachers, administrators, and learning advisors share ideas on self-access and gain insights on how they could best adapt to a changing landscape of self-access learning.

The morning began with a tour of e-space (a self-access center at Konan Women's University), followed by opening remarks by JASAL president Hisako Yamashita introducing the history and mission of JASAL, a plenary talk by Dr. Jo Mynard, and ten oral presentations. After lunch and a second tour of e-space, twelve posters were presented simultaneously in an open room, and finally, ten more presentations were given. The "theme" emphasized at this year's conference was embodied by Dr. Jo Mynard's observation that self-access is changing and shifting and that there are many opportunities that lie ahead. She stressed that in the near future, SALCs will need to become social hubs where students could come for social, emotional, and learning support.

SALC Design

Your Space, Your English: Creating a Student-Centered, Student-Driven English Language Learning Space

Paul Mathieson, Nara Medical University, Nara

Mathieson shared how Nara Medical University (NMU) ran their English language learning space (ELS) and what roles teachers played in shaping their space. Citing Littlewood (1999), Mathieson discussed the concept of learner autonomy and highlighted the difference between reactive autonomy versus proactive autonomy. Unlike reactive autonomy, where students take control of their own learning after a trajectory is first established, under proactive autonomy, students have complete control of the direction in their language learning. He explained how ELS lunch time chats at NMU were run by students where they could engage in various activities such as studying, playing English games, participating in special events, and eating food. In sharing a story of how a student took a more proactive approach when the student asked how ELS lunch time chats could be more lively, Mathieson suggested that students are not as reactive as educators might think in their English learning. He emphasized the goals of NMU's space, such as encouraging Japanese students to talk together in English, increasing learner responsibility, and supporting teachers as role models and advisers.

Creating a Friendly Atmosphere – SALC Layout

Lindsay Mack, Meg Varney, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Oita

Believing that self-access centers should be spaces where students would want to hang out and speak English (Cooker, 2010), Mack and Varney discussed how they created a friendly atmosphere at their self-access learning center (SALC) at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU). For example, an open space and comfortable chairs were utilized to make the space inviting. To encourage students to have a clear study purpose, a physical tree of English goals stood tall in the middle of the SALC where students could write their English learning goals on a piece of paper and leave their notes on the tree. The SALC also had rooms with a specific color scheme for each room (the blue room was the movie room). Mack and Varney discovered that

such a layout didn't work as expected and that additional changes were necessary to have a quieter, more user-friendly space. Listening booths were installed, a concentration zone was established, and privacy with shaded windows were implemented in study areas, which also added to the versatility of spaces that could accommodate different learning styles and preferences. Furthermore, to create a more inviting place, the SALC kept the door open throughout the day, a greeter and receptionist position was created, and resources in the SALC were centralized. The presentation concluded with some simple tips to improve the local school's SALC, such as opening the door and thinking about it from the user's perspective, developing a question of the week or question of the day, using Facebook, and involving student workers in decisions.

Designing Learning Environments to Impact Student Use in Self-Access Centers

Andy Tweed, Atsumi Yamaguchi, Meijo University, Aichi

Tweed and Yamaguchi focused on the importance of designing learning environments that provide space for communicative language usage. They explained how Meijo University designed and arranged their space, Global Plaza, which opened in April 2016 at two campuses, and discussed several frameworks and dimensions that one should consider when designing an effective self-access center. One of the frameworks Tweed and Yamaguchi referred to was the one by Knapp, Burgoon and Saine which considered "formality, warmth, privacy, familiarity, constraint, distance, size or volume of space, arrangement of objects within the environment, materials used in the environment, amount of linear perspectives, lighting and shading, color, temperature, noise, and sensory stimulation" to be all important (Knapp, Burgoon & Saine, as cited in Hickson, Stacks & Moore, 2004). The presenters gave examples of how the positioning of furniture affected the quality of student engagement in activities. For example, in areas designated for quiet reading, rearrangement of the chairs into a straight line encouraged more involvement with quiet reading. For social areas, to improve the facilitation of social interaction, several tables and chairs were replaced with rectangular orange sofas positioned in several islands. Tweed and Yamaguchi explained how a face-to-face arrangement was linked to competitive or confrontational conversation, while having an island of four sofas with eight

corners created a space for more intimate conversation. These measures increased the daily average usage of the SACs at both areas.

SALC Leadership

Changing our SAC: Student-initiated Campaign for a Better Atmosphere

Ayumi Tahara, Erina Kinoshita, Yui Fukushima, Konan Women's University, Hyogo

One of the best-received presentations in this year's JASAL conference was made by three Konan Women's University (KWU) undergraduate students who are a part of a special student committee that helps support their SALC, also known as e-space. The students discussed the problems that KWU students had with using e-space, for example, that many of the KWU students were not using e-space for language learning but as a chatting or eating place. To foster an atmosphere for English study, the student committee initiated a campaign called "For better e-space" by making changes to e-space. They:

1. Moved the magazine shelf from the middle of e-space to the side which created a more open floor plan where students could move freely across e-space;
2. Changed how the whiteboard in e-space was used by encouraging students to write any questions they wanted so they could hear feedback from another student or teacher later in the day or week;
3. Added signs for learning "vocabulary of the week" and created a live news corner where students could watch and hear about the latest news from NHK World;
4. Prepared a new TOEIC Corner which was very attractive for students wanting to improve their TOEIC scores;
5. Created a movie vocabulary and phrase board where students could write down new English phrases and vocabulary learned from movies they watched at the e-space theater;
6. Added travel abroad experience posters as well as information boards on upcoming presentations at e-space;
7. Created visual aids to encourage students to remember their manners, use English, and make new friends;

8. Created a logo for their campaign and made badges and posters to promote e-space all over campus.

The responses from students at large were positive. Many students said that compared to the previous year, e-space was a fun place to talk in English, more comfortable, interesting, and relaxing. The awareness of the e-space also increased across campus. While it was difficult to motivate all students with their English learning, the student committee was pleased that they could create communities within e-space, which are very important to the learning process.

Diversity and Leadership: Key Elements in Building a Successful Grassroots Learning Community

John Tomecsek III, Osaka Kyoiku University, Osaka

Tomecsek shared how the Global Learning Community SAC at Osaka Kyoiku University grew significantly within a short period of time. Among the insights he provided were:

- 1) Students were given empowerment at an early stage of development.
- 2) Student diversity and leadership training was instrumental in helping their SALC grow into a community of language learners.
- 3) The variety of experiences and talents of its members enriched the learning community.
- 4) The value of inclusiveness was an important cultural value implemented early so that all students of the university could participate.
- 5) Growth requires inclusiveness.
- 6) Selling English didn't work, but selling dreams and goals did.
- 7) A strong belief in leadership training in which students had opportunities to lead initiatives and be trained as leaders was essential.
- 8) Strong development of problem solving skills and open lines of communication were effective in raising student leaders.

Tomecsek's presentation demonstrated that a SALC can thrive with strong leadership skills.

SALC Integration and Curriculum

Integrating a Self-Access Conversation Program in a Beginner Level English Course

Maho Sano, Soka University, Tokyo

Sano of Soka University explained how she integrated self-access learning in her beginner-level English course for freshmen. Her students' TOEIC scores were below 280, averaging 200, and the class consisted of 20 Japanese male EFL learners. While the course was primarily a TOEIC-based course, some communicative goals were included in the syllabus and visits to a self-access conversation program accounted for 10% of the learner's total course grade. Sano noted how in her ideal situation, students would conduct some personal reflection in the classroom and participate in a self-access conversation program, which would in turn, lead to further personal reflection within the classroom. Unfortunately, she discovered that students were not participating in Soka University's SAC due to low confidence, fear of risk-taking, lack of English ability, low motivation, and lack of reflection skills. To overcome these obstacles, Sano provided a series of speaking strategy training in class and focused on a topic per week that matched the speaking topic used in the school's conversation program. She also created a log sheet that covered details from strategies and communication skills learned in class. From her observations, the students began to show curiosity in English and attend self-access programs while using strategies and skills in communicating. While a few students still resisted and a widening gap between learners' proficiency levels began to emerge, Sano remained persistent by continuing to address emotional issues and investigating both motivating and demotivating factors in speaking practice. Ultimately, Sano's recommendation for those who are in similar situations is to make use of personal findings in future lesson planning.

SALC Training

Peer Assistants in a SAC: Individual and Group Training

Meg Varney & Lindsay Mack, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Oita

Varney and Mack presented on their experience in raising a group of peer assistants (PA) who are students working at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University's (APU) SALC. By functioning as tutors and greeters who can perform various administrative tasks, PAs strive to be the friendliest student staff on campus, provide the best learning experiences for students, and help more students use the school's SALC. PAs are hired in January and are not only given a PA

manual for self-study but are immediately assigned to shadow a more experienced PA, as the *sempai* system is a very important aspect of the PA program. Once a PA is settled, continuous on-the-job training is provided in the form of group training where PAs may receive further training to increase their proficiency as a greeter, learn how to keep clear records as a tutor, develop communication skills with low level students, and also improve proficiency in helping students with their pronunciation. Discussion times are also an important element of group training where PAs have opportunities to talk about issues and receive feedback and advice. Varney and Mack demonstrated how a balancing of the new and old ways of training are effective in developing skilled PAs at a SALC. Their advice is to “spend lots of time hiring.”

Introducing a Mentoring Program for Experienced Learning Advisors

Satoko Kato, Kanda Institute of Foreign Languages, Tokyo

Kato presented about a new mentoring program for experienced learning advisors who are trained to engage in reflective dialogue. Engaging in reflective dialogues can ultimately lead to transformational advising. Transformational advising helps students see beyond language proficiency, challenge existing beliefs on learning, and ultimately make changes in the nature of one's learning (Kato & Mynard, 2016). Kato shared her experience advising a student who wanted to work in the fashion industry but was struggling with her English learning. Kato helped the student become aware of her own courage and strength and highlighted an unforeseen aspect of the student's language learning. This increased the student's motivation to study English which Kato identified as a transformational experience. In the presentation, Kato detailed her mentor training program which she developed and conducted with several experienced Learning Advisors. Kato's mentor training program follows a basic learning advisor professional development course on 12 strategies in advising and an advanced course where case studies are reviewed and studied which she both co-developed with Hisako Yamashita. Kato's mentoring program is part of a continuous professional development program that experienced language advisors can partake in. A mentoring program can be quite beneficial in maintaining and improving learning advising service in a SALC.

SALC Lessons Learned

From Language Learning Spaces to Traditional Japanese Craft Studios

Mark Hammond, Kanazawa College of Art, Ishikawa

Hammond showcased the SALC experience at Kanazawa College of Art, a small college that focuses on art and creativity. The English Help Center at Kanazawa College of Art was established in 2010 and their SALC was called the Language Learning Space. A one-hour session from 5:30pm to 6:30pm is held once a week where students speak in English about any topic they want to discuss. Between six to ten students attend on a weekly basis. Students come to show and tell on creative works, describe current projects and assignments, explain technical procedures of art, design, and traditional Japanese craft, as well as develop friendships with exchange students. Interestingly, the SALC program extends beyond the SALC space. Hammond discovered that getting out of a fixed designed space can be very helpful in sparking curiosity and fostering further future discussions. He also articulated convincingly that when students have something to share and can express their creativity in various spaces, student motivation in language learning increases.

Lessons Learned About Effective Organization and Promotion During a Large-Scale SAC's First Year

Thomas Mach & Shari Yamamoto, Konan University, Hyogo

Mach and Yamamoto presented on lessons learned from the first year after launching a large-scale SAC, The Global Zone Porte Language Loft, at Konan University in September 2015. The SAC at Konan University was designed as three multi-functional spaces: The Language Loft, the Ajisai Room, and the Global Learning Commons. The Language Loft is the center for opportunities for beyond-the-classroom English experiences on campus. The Ajisai room is a space where international students and Japanese students can interact and build relationships. The Global Learning Commons is a place where students can relax, meet friends, have a snack, and think globally. Mach and Yamamoto explained that some of the advantages of having an open floor loft space on the first floor was accessibility, flexibility, and allowance of students to

overflow into other areas, while a disadvantage was the noise level. However, the SAC has had high involvement from students, with 20 exchange students who work as tutors and 30 student workers as assistants. Full-time faculty are involved with lunch periods and special events and part-time teachers offer non-academic workshops and lectures as well. To encourage students to use the Language Loft, stamp cards are used in which ten stamps is equivalent to 10% of the grade for first-year students taking English communication classes. To earn a stamp, a student could make a visit to the SAC, complete an English learning task such as filling out lyrics to an English hit pop song and answering questions about the song, or attend an event. The main lessons that Mach and Yamamoto learned from their first year was that tasks for students clarified visitation purposes and motivated students to attend. Secondly, LINE, a popular social media app in Japan, was extremely effective as a promotional tool.

Poster Presentations Report

The poster presentation session took place following lunch and lasted for an hour with six poster presentations being presented simultaneously in the first 30 minutes and another six poster presentations presented simultaneously in the latter 30 minutes.

One of the poster presentations was titled, “Functional, Emotional, and Pedagogical Aspects in Designing Materials to Promote Self-Access Language Learning,” presented by Azusa Foale of Kokugakuin University, Yaeko Watase of Hiroshima Bunkyo Women’s University, and Yukari Rutson-Griffiths of Hiroshima Bunkyo Women’s University. The presenters proposed the thesis that SACs need to have materials that are accessible, usable, well-maintained, durable, and fulfill the emotional as well as the pedagogical aspects of student expectations. Display and arrangement, colors, properly used images, as well as alignment are all very important in helping learners feel comfortable and avoid distraction.

Another presentation was titled, “Integrating Self-Access Learning Center Resources to Promote Learning Autonomy and Identity Expression,” by David Cooke. Cooke introduced the SALC at Kanda University of International Studies and how he successfully integrated the center’s resources with an identity and language learning course he had taught. He used gallery presentations, panel discussions, the free conversation area, the multilingual communication center, presentation room, and computer lab to help students better understand their identities and increase their abilities and willingness to communicate.

Conclusion

The JASAL 2016 Annual Conference was a forum in which many educators could share ideas, connect with one another, and help encourage each other in their pursuit of improving self-access learning at their local institutions. The community is patently growing, and teachers, administrators, student advisers, as well as students are being exposed to self-access and experiencing the benefits of self-access more so than at any time in its history. The JASAL committee did an exemplary job in planning the annual event, creating a remarkably detailed and considerate conference program that had thought-provoking content as well as carefully-crafted time that allowed participants to connect with one another and build community with each other. As the future of self-access learning appears to evolve towards more social opportunities with an emphasis on the emotional side of learning, students will ultimately benefit when educators of autonomous learning can come together regularly and invest in one another, modelling a transformative community which could lead to further transformational experiences in the field of language learning.

Notes on the contributor

Michael Lin is an adjunct English instructor involved with SALCs at Kobe Shoin Women's University, Konan University, and Konan Women's University. He has been teaching EFL in the Kansai area for the past five years. He enjoys presenting about topics that students are interested in at SALCs and finds joy when his students find community and increased motivation. His research interests include self-access learning, learner autonomy, tasked-based teaching, and law and medical content based teaching.

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Evaluating Language Learning Spaces: Developing Formative Evaluation Procedures to Enable Growth and Innovation

Katherine Thornton, Otemon Gakuin University, Japan

Despite the frequent presence of language learning spaces (LLSs) at institutions across the world since the 1990s, there is still no consensus on how to evaluate such centres. With the exception of Morrison (2005), we do not even have a good number of well-documented approaches or frameworks for those wishing to conduct an evaluation to draw from. The very nature of a self-access centre, with its fluid population of users pursuing a diverse variety of learning goals, makes the task considerably more challenging than a course evaluation, which usually has clearly defined objectives and a fixed group of participants. This problem has been recognised since self-access first emerged as its own field (Riley, 1996), but recent surveys of the field reveal a similar picture today (Gardner & Miller, 2015; Reinders & Lazarro, 2008).

Setting the Focus for Evaluation

Before one even starts to attempt an evaluation, it is first necessary to determine what is to be evaluated. LLSs are established for many different reasons and, in many contexts, not all stakeholders share the same vision for the centre, and what constitutes a successful programme.

While front line staff who work in the LLS may emphasise qualitative aspects like the development of autonomous learning skills, administrators may be more concerned with quantitative measures such as the number of users, or the language proficiency gains of users, as determined by standardised tests. Some institutions, in contexts where LLSs are less common, may have established a centre in part to attract students to attend that school over others, and therefore measure its success in its ability to raise the number of admissions.

There may also be pressure on a centre to show ever increasing growth in usage, but little understanding of what this growth in user numbers actually means. Too much emphasis on the “headcount” aspect of a LLS evaluation can lead to pressure to fill the space with users by any means necessary, which can mean overlooking initiatives to improve learning gains, and the effectiveness of the services offered. Similarly, an evaluation which deals only with qualitative measures, unless it is presented in a compelling way, can fail to have the impact necessary to convince funding bodies and management teams to support the LLS sufficiently,

potentially resulting in loss of specialised staff, downsizing, and in some cases even closure of the physical space.

A good evaluation needs to take into consideration the needs of different stakeholders, and generate data which can be used to inform further decision-making to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the services offered through the LLS. While there is still a need for more creative tools which facilitate the evaluation process and provide truly useful insights into the workings of language learning spaces, the papers in this final column instalment put forward some innovative evaluation ideas.

Evaluation in Three Contexts

Daya Datwani-Choy from the University of Hong Kong (HKU) describes the findings from a very detailed case study which aimed to evaluate the self-access centre at HKU using Morrison's (2003) SAC Mapping and Evaluation Framework, the most comprehensive model for SAC evaluation yet produced. In this paper, based on her doctoral research, Datwani-Choy identifies the major findings of the case study and the changes that have since been implemented, especially in terms of staffing and training, to improve the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of the human and non-human support services. Her research has also lead to the development of an adapted and simplified version of the SAC Mapping for HKU.

While Datwani-Choy's paper describes a very comprehensive SAC evaluation project, the second case study in this instalment is on a much smaller scale. In my own contribution from Otemon Gakuin University, Japan, my colleague Nao Noguchi and I describe how we developed an enhanced head-count tool (a common technique for developing a picture of LLS usage). The enhanced tool can provide useful data about how students are using the space, at the same time as providing stakeholders from the university administration the necessary information on user numbers that they have requested. Combined with the results of a qualitative survey administered with users, we explain how we have used the data from the two tools to make some informed decisions about the services offered in our LLS.

The final paper in this instalment, indeed in this collection, comes from Jo Mynard at the Self-Access Learning Centre (SALC) at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS), which has one of the larger LLSs in Japan, offering various advising and other services to its student body. Mynard distinguishes between retrospective approaches to evaluation and reflects on the evaluation procedures currently in place, and more future-

looking and predictive approaches, which she suggests could facilitate further innovations in the field. She describes an approach which is grounded in a detailed ten-year strategic plan which sets out the proposed future direction of the SALC. In order to make the evaluation of multiple aspects of the SALC as efficient as possible, Mynard suggests a carefully scheduled timeline of ongoing research projects, designed to investigate different services at regular intervals over the ten years of the strategic plan. Finally, Mynard suggests that future evaluations could also be predictive as well as retrospective, taking advantage of the possibilities presented by big data and learning analytics in terms of, for example, building a detailed profiles of the student body, which could be used to make more informed decisions.

Reflecting on the Language Learning Spaces Column

When I was first planning this column, it seemed fitting that evaluation would be a good way to finish the series, as it is a necessary process conducted *after* an initiative has been implemented. While I have always known that this was too simplistic a characterisation of good evaluation practices, on reading, editing and indeed writing about this issue, it has become ever more clear to me that evaluation needs to be not a summative end point, but a necessary step in the facilitation of further growth and innovation.

I hope that this collection as a whole has served to highlight the many innovative practices being implemented across the world of self-access language learning, and has provided readers with new perspectives on their own practices. I would like to thank all the authors for their contributions, especially their detailed and honest reflections on successes and failures, which can inform the decision-making of others and save us from repeating others' mistakes. I would also like to show my appreciation for all the many reviewers who contributed precious time to offer insightful and constructive advice to the authors on their manuscripts, and made my job as editor so much easier. Finally, I would like to thank the SiSAL Editor, Jo Mynard, for her support of this project at all stages, right up to her own contribution in this issue. I am extremely grateful for the forum that SiSAL Journal provides for us to share our practices in such a supportive environment.

Column Reviewers

Thank you to everyone who gave precious time to review the manuscripts for this column:

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Evaluating a Self-Access Centre's Effectiveness and Efficiency: A Case Study and Reflection

Daya Datwani-Choy, The Centre for Applied English Studies, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Abstract

This article discusses changes that occurred after a case study that examined the effectiveness and efficiency of a Self-access Centre (SAC) within a university in Hong Kong using Morrison's (2003) *Evaluation of Self-access Language Learning Centre* framework. The case study addressed issues from a stakeholder's perspective by collecting data from learners through an online questionnaire and conducting 15 semi-structured interviews, an advisers' focus group and management interviews and reports. The outcome of the study showed that a wider perspective for senior managers and insights for evaluation of the support services is vital to making key decisions in context. Upon reflection of the findings with the new SAC manager, more acute decision-making and continuous improvement is needed to enhance effectiveness and efficiency of the running of the SAC. To achieve this, regular feedback from various stakeholders, also re-structuring human and non-human support systems is vital.

Context

The University of Hong Kong (HKU) is considered to be the top university in Hong Kong with all subject content (even Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics - STEM) taught in English (except Chinese language and translation). The Centre of Applied English Studies (CAES) runs English courses for all undergraduate students in the university two masters programme and supervision of Research Postgraduates. CAES Annual Report 2012/13 (see Figure 1) shows HKU's student population in comparison with that of CAES. However, users of the self-access centre (SAC) can be any staff, research and taught postgraduates and undergraduates in HKU, not necessarily studying any CAES courses.

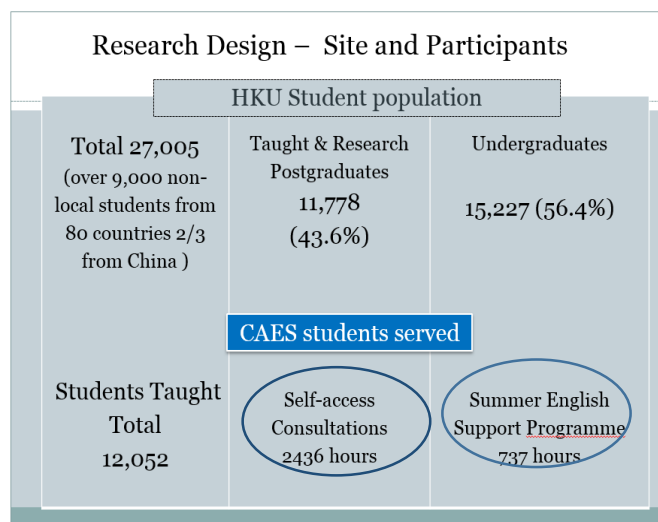


Figure 1. Hong Kong University and CAES Student Population in Year 2012/13

The services offered by our SAC include English advising, workshops, language learning activities and online resources. However, there are no full-time staff in the SAC. In fact, the SAC coordinator had a full teaching load with a reduction included for Master's degree programme coordination and SAC coordination. At the time of the case study a group of about 10 lecturers were assigned one to two hours of SAC advising duties per week to make up a full teaching load. There was an induction meeting in the beginning of each semester to run through administrative matters but no training in advising was provided.

To date, top management has been narrowly defining the success of these programmes by using incomplete data that focuses on frequency of the services taken up by users as a measure of the efficient use of resources (human resources and facilities). Effectiveness in terms of enhancement of learning, what the end users (students) and service providers (human and non-human support) deem as effective, has seldom been considered.

The case study described in this paper aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the services we provide in enhancing students' learning and developing 'learner autonomy' which is the ultimate goal of most self-access centres. The case study took place in 2012/13 and was guided by Morrison's (2003) framework "Evaluation of Self-access Language Learning Centre".

First, the case study and its findings will be presented, with a suggested revision to the framework, followed by steps taken after consideration of the results in the study.

The Case Study

Morrison's (2003) framework emphasises the need to first identify the main aspects of the SAC context being evaluated through a "mapping" process, and then collect data from all major stakeholders. Space restrictions limit the amount of detail that can be given here, but methods used include: an advisers' focus group, semi-structured interviews with 15 SAC users, an interview with the SAC coordinator, as well as the examination of internal reports from 2011 to 2014. CAES Annual Report 2012/13 is cited mostly in this article as the case study took place that year. The SAC users' interviews were transcribed and coded using analysis software Weft QDA into four themes, namely: objectives, self-perception, interaction and learning culture. Similar themes were used in the analysis of advisers' focus group and the SAC coordinator interview.

The Case Study Findings

The case study highlighted a number of aspects of the SAC which required improvement to improve the effectiveness of the services offered to students. Due to limited space, this paper will focus on two major findings.

Training of advisers and tutors

The case study revealed a lack of staff training and professional development. At the time of the case study there was close to no staff training except for one induction meeting at the beginning of the semester basically for administrative purposes. The SAC coordinator assumed that SAC advisers should have had teacher training while peer tutors (student volunteers) and writing support tutors (who are mostly full-time research postgraduates of CAES under scholarship) though not teacher-trained may be self-trained if necessary (and a training video for this purpose was produced (Voller, 1998)). Mozzon-McPherson (2007) emphasises the importance of training for language advisers, considering it a developmental process of professional growth in which advisers become learners themselves as participants in dialogue looking for answers and carrying out action research. However, the SAC coordinator's and advisers' (lecturers in CAES) priority is to teach undergraduate and higher education courses run by the CAES. There needs to be some collaborative learning even if advisers work autonomously, but language advisers claimed the focus group itself was the first time there was any sharing.

Cost-effectiveness

While the SAC Coordinator argued that self-access support services are becoming more effective, the advisers' focus group and learner interviews revealed areas for improvement. The SAC coordinator stated that self-access support services should be less

costly in recent years because online resources are freely available, the physical space is smaller and fewer books are purchased as they can be found in the library. He also pointed out that cost of language advising was 20 minutes back in the 1990s whereas currently it would be 12 minutes (calculated by a lecturer's pay in proportion to time spent in each advising session). However, the advisory service is still the most expensive resource provided in the self-access centre. Moreover, advisers in the focus group mentioned that much time with learners was spent on tedious repetition of matters such as how to log into the booking system. Besides finding the registration cumbersome, 12 out of 15 learners interviewed needed clarification of services even though they were users who had filled in the questionnaire and volunteered to be interviewed. This validates advisers' complaints that much of the 20-minute session was taken up by having to repeatedly introduce the services because learners tend to be unclear about their English learning objectives and the reason for consultation, which is not the most efficient use of advisers' time.

It has also been difficult to get accurate data in terms of supply and demand of the services. The Internal CAES Self-access report (2012/13) stated that the need for self-access consultation services (Figure 1) was demonstrated by student uptake of the services, since it was entirely voluntary. It shows 2,436 self-access consultations hours, but it does not reflect real numbers as three consultations take place each hour. There needs to be a system to check the exact number of learners actually served. Writing Support and Peer Tutoring showed an even higher uptake but this was not shown in the report because the former was a new initiative for the current year and the latter was a collaborative effort with an external body. Moreover, there are many reasons learners were not able to book the services. Some sessions are booked by users who do not show up, so others lose the opportunity to benefit from the service. This shows that depending only on summative data is insufficient.

Adapting the Evaluation Framework

Morrison's (2003) original SAC Mapping for HKU (as each SAC is unique, his evaluation framework first requires each institution to conduct a mapping process to identify key features) had five components. From the findings of the case study and in consultation with Dr. Morrison, it has been decided that the five components (adapted framework see Figure 2), will be reduced to three protagonists; the learner, human support and non-human support. I suggested the resources and environment components, from the original framework, should go under non-human support, which was agreed. Reports with feedback

and data from various support services need to be collated every semester and closely monitored for evaluation and decision-making.

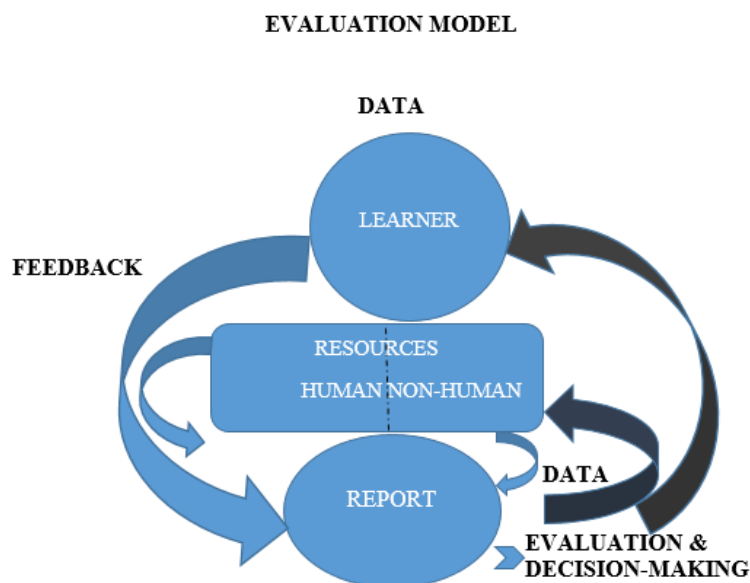


Figure 2. Adapted Evaluation Framework for SACs in Hong Kong
(SAC mapping indicated by an arrow)

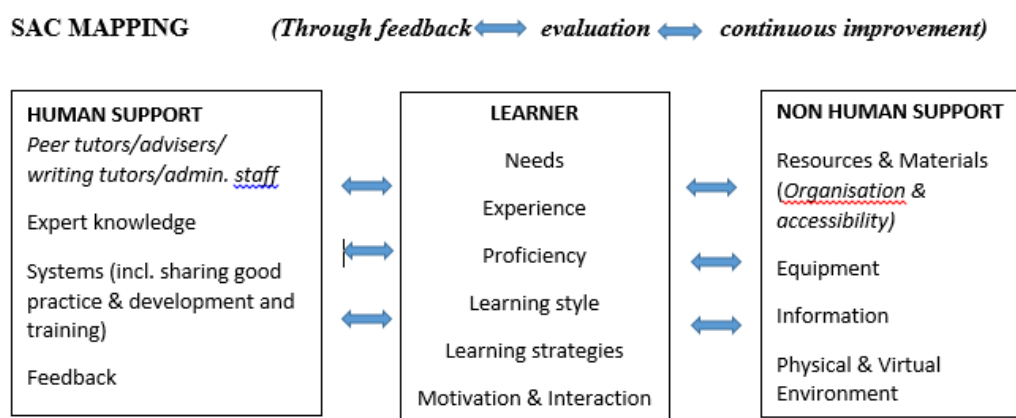


Figure 3. Recommended Version of Morrison (2003) Framework's Hong Kong SAC Mapping

As Figure 3 shows for SAC mapping (newly adapted version), continuous improvement can be applied to the human and non-human support systems each semester. Since evaluation and feedback will take place regularly, decisions can then be made for adjustments of the services offered, and this will enhance effectiveness.

Main Changes That Were Implemented

As a result of the case study, several changes have been implemented to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the HKU SAC.

An enhanced non-human support system

In practice the new SAC Mapping proposes several systems under non-human support, including *information* and *resources*. The use of IT (non-human support) has helped eliminate some of the advisers' tedious tasks, improved the flow of information and of finding resources with instructional videos. Sharing of "good practices" by interviews with students who appreciated SAC services which are then broadcasted on our Campus TV is also underway.

Human support system

Since the case study, the SAC has diversified the human support system, and now offers several different kinds of support, improving the cost-effectiveness of the services.

Language advisers. In order to free up much of the language advisers' time (the most costly resource) an enhanced log-in and information system is now in place. Moreover, while learners previously had the option of filling in a 10-page document, Students' English Development Plan (SDEP), this is now reduced to two pages (see appendix C), so students are clearer about their objective or sub-skills development when visiting a language adviser. Advisers' time-slots have been changed from "one size fits all" 20-minute sessions to 30-minute slots for learners who want to make a plan enhancing English and study skills and 10-minute slots for those who wanted a 'quick fix' such as test practice a day before the exam.

Although learners' initial questions may be about how to find materials or use of equipment, language advisers who help learners will most likely build trust and encourage them to return for advisory sessions. However if the adviser lacks the practical skills to assist learners in the beginning, they will not return and the opportunity for further language advising will be lost (Gardner & Miller, 1999). The case study identified a lack of training and professional development opportunities for advisers. The glass panels in the Advisory Zone and weekly email updates enable advisers to know what kind of services are going on so they are able to direct students which activities to join. Through measures such as these, more sharing between experienced and new advisers and a community of practice is beginning to emerge in our centre.

English Teaching Assistants (ETAs). A one-off Teaching Development Grant made hiring four overseas ETAs (undergraduate students who had a Teacher's Certificate) possible

for one year (2012/13). This group of younger tutors helped expand our services (offering services at other campuses nearby, for example the Medical Campus and Toastmasters Club in the evenings) and were less expensive than the advisers. As the next academic year without ETAs saw a sudden drop in numbers in all the services offered by SAC, it was thus decided use CAES's own funding to hire ETAs for academic years 2015/16 and 2016/17.

Administration. Given that advisers are the most costly part of maintaining the SAC, student helpers or clerical staff may be deployed to provide practical information to learners and administer the SDEP (appendix C) before meeting an adviser. A full-time clerk from the Learning Commons has been provided since 2015/16 without additional cost.

Peer Tutoring. The Centre of Development and Resources for Students (CEDARS) had a reward system for students' activities. This was an opportunity to collaborate with external agencies in the university. Utilizing the reward system they had in place it was easy to set up a 'peer tutoring' system. The 'peers' who were exchange students, from various cultures and backgrounds, who chat in English for 30 minutes with learners who reserve a session. They proved to be most popular, according to students' questionnaire feedback, and much less costly than advisers and ETAs. A narrative study conducted in Japan (Yamaguchi, 2011) found that student staff members could affect their fellow learners who visit the SACs, acting as role models and further activating their agency to gain voice in the Community of Practice (CoP). From 2016/17 these peer tutors increased from 20 (in 2012/13) to 50 and now conduct both individual and group sessions.

Writing support. Our research postgraduates became a resource for a new Writing Support service from 2013 (a new initiative at the time of the case study). Time slots of 20 minutes were offered for these postgraduates to detect common writing errors and give students advice on fossilized errors, without proofreading their work. More lecturers were added later to provide writing support for learners of higher levels such as Master's and PhD students. In addition, an online programme for writing support is currently being developed to start in 2017/18.

Collaboration and space

Securing students' space in the Learning Commons. One of the larger offices was used as a SAC when CAES was relocated to the Faculty of Arts new Composite Building in 2012. After a while we were successful in getting space integrated with the Chi Wah Learning Commons (the three floors with state-of-the-art décor was initially catered for students' use only). Resources such as books, DVDs, and magazines were moved into that larger space for students to work independently. It has been transformed by name as part of

the *Advisory Zone*. This is another effort to step up SAC support services and become more visible.

The new location of the SAC brought opportunities of collaboration with other sub-units such as CEDARS (for peer tutoring) and Learning Environment Services (which provides our one full-time SAC staff). These sub-units provide support for services university wide and have a positive relationship with students, especially undergraduates. Murray and Fujishima (2013) emphasised that social learning space or learning commons share a lot of features with SACs. The need for more emphasis on social interaction was identified in the learner interviews but the only instance (at the time of the case study) of social learning observed from the interviewees is when learners got each other's contact after discussion groups. Such social learning opportunities have now increased in the Learning Commons, for example social learning with ETAs, being allowed to bring a friend for language advising and a Facebook page where users can interact in English online.

Implications for Practice

English support services are central to the university because English is the language used in subject-content teaching and not merely as a second language for daily conversations or travelling. Although the English support services are constantly fully utilized, as shown in summative reports, the fact is that much more could be done to improve *effectiveness* to allow a larger student population to benefit from such services, making their provision more *efficient* - indeed there are many opportunities for co-operation with other faculties and sub-units.

Supporting the University's vision and mission

While CAES' vision is that it aims to be recognized as a regional and international leader in the field of second language education through teaching, research and innovation, which makes a vital contribution to the university (CAES Annual report, 2012-3), SACs do more than that. English is not the only focus of SACs, it is also to help students become autonomous learners which clearly aligns with 'lifelong learning' and 'nurtures students...in a culture that fosters creativity, learning and freedom of thought, enquiry and expression' in line with the HKU's vision (University of Hong Kong, 2016).

Gardner and Miller (2014) emphasize the importance of an organizational vision and the rationale for the sub-units' existence that is visible through the mission and is aligned with a SAC's strategic planning. The SAC does not have a clear mission statement, which has

caused some confusion among students and advisers as they did not really understand the rationale behind the support services offered. In fact, three out of eight of the University's mission points are related to SAC work, which show there is great potential in expanding SAC services to a wider student population.

Embracing a wider student population

The SAC's effectiveness can be enhanced if there is more attention given to learner diversity, which in turn could widen our student base. Language advisers questioned why international students who also need English support were not using our services. In higher education, learners' starting point should be their proficiency level and advice may be provided on the next level that he or she wishes to attain.

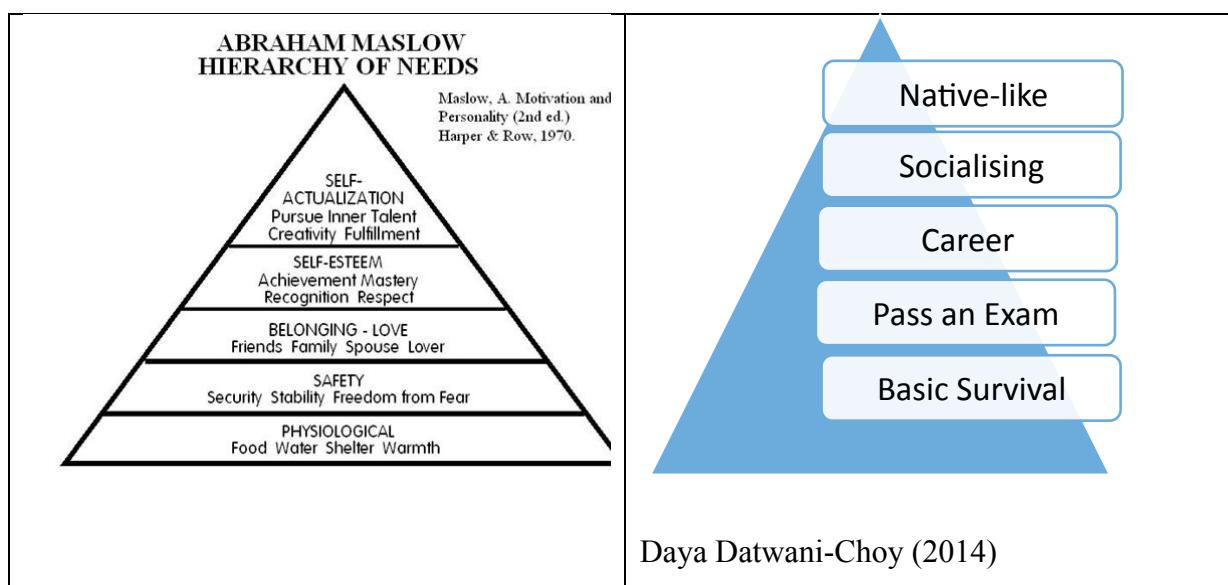


Figure 4. An Analogy of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Applied to English Learners' Needs

An analogy would be, using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (see Figure 4). The basic need would be survival such as asking for directions when travelling to English-speaking countries (actually some postgraduates need more input especially if they are coming from the Mainland China). Those who visit the SAC to pass an IELTS or TOEFL exam, may be at the next level. Most Year 4 or postgraduate students are seeking employment, so will have a higher need in terms of professional English. Learners who want to climb up the social ladder and being able to communicate in English near native-like belong to Maslow's two highest levels referring to self-esteem and self-actualisation. Currently, the SAC, while open to all, does not attract users at every level, so more need to be done to appeal to a more diverse range of learners.

A strengthened core team

Rapid changes in the external environment make it necessary for a core team to be responsive and make adjustments in a timely manner. The Community of Practice (CoP) needs to function and develop its own judgment regarding supporting learners effectively. Feedback is now carried out promptly for users and every semester for service providers (see Appendix A and B), and the data collected is visible to the core team of SAC advisers, enabling shared understanding and informed decision-making.

In conclusion, self-access plays a vital role in providing support services to campus-wide users and not only the students of CAES courses, especially in an English medium university. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the SAC's role in the context of the university it serves, not only as a sub-unit of a particular faculty. In collaboration with other sub-units on campus, we were able to produce desired results without having to invest many more resources. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of the self-access centre requires more than summative reports based on headcounts. There needs to be sharing of good practices, development of a core team which operates as a supportive Community of Practice and a quality "tool kit" of resources for continuous improvement through constant feedback and evaluation.

Notes on the Contributor

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Appendix A – Regular feedback collected from Advisers and Tutors

Your 2015-16 Semester Advisory Zone Experience

Page 1 of 3

Appendix A

Your 2015-16 Semester Advisory Zone Experience

* Required

Untitled Section

What advisory service(s) did you work in?

- ☐ Language Advising
- ☐ Discussion
- ☐ Workshop
- ☐ Writing Support
- ☐ ETA

How did you find the experience? *

Bullet point answers or a short paragraph is fine. Comment on whether it was fulfilling, tiring, too much, not supported enough ...anything!

Your answer

What improvements can we make to our services? *

Can be anything from the space, more resources, more than the allotted time, less than the allotted time, ...anything! Bullets or short paragraph - both fine

Your answer



<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfOnh0SwPPOa8tf7kZEgcIXGblQZrYG...> 08/Aug/16

Your 2015-16 Semester Advisory Zone Experience

Page 2 of 3

Any ideas how we can further promote our services to students? *

We already have FB, VE site (hopefully soon a new website), and next semester we will send out weekly what's on to teachers to pass to their students. And also, Events of the Week on the glass doors in the Advisory Zone

Your answer

Would you like to continue to work in the Advisory Zone (Self Access option for CAES teachers) next semester? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Rather not
- ☐ Not fussed
- ☐ Other :

Anything else to suggest to make the Advisory Zone experience for you and the students better?

If you'd like to write anything anonymous, please type out and leave in my pigeon hole.

Your answer

Page 2 of 2

BACK

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Google Forms



<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfOnh0SwPPOa8tf7kZEgeIXGblQZrYG...> 08/Aug/16

Appendix B – Real time feedback from learners (after every consultation, workshop and discussion group, etc.), only 3 questions.

CAES Advisory Zone: Workshop & Discussion Feedback

CAES welcomes any feedback on the workshop or discussion session you have just attended. Your feedback can help us improve our English language advisory services for HKU students. THANKS VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME!

*必填



1. Which workshop or discussion session have you just attended? (DAY & TIME is ok if you don't know the name of the workshop/discussion) *

您的回答

2. Tick the 3 that most apply to your experience today *

- ☐ The session was beneficial to my English improvement
- ☐ The session was enjoyable
- ☐ The session was well planned / or facilitated
- ☐ The session was not beneficial to my English improvement
- ☐ The session could have been more enjoyable
- ☐ The session could have been planned / or facilitated more effectively

3. Please briefly comment further on your choice from question 2. *

您的回答

4. What was the best learning outcome of the workshop / discussion for you ... or your main criticism of the workshop / discussion?

您的回答

Appendix C – New Students English Development Plan

ENGLISH LANGUAGE – CAES LEARNING NEEDS ANALYSIS																																																																			
1. Background Info <small>(This form is to be completed with an ETA/Adviser)</small> Name: _____ Year: _____ Native Language: _____ Faculty: _____ Free time: (please add times of when you are free to the table below) <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <thead> <tr> <th>Day</th> <th>Morning</th> <th>Afternoon</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>Monday</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Tuesday</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Wednesday</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Thursday</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Friday</td><td></td><td></td></tr> </tbody> </table> How do you learn best? _____ _____		Day	Morning	Afternoon	Monday			Tuesday			Wednesday			Thursday			Friday			2. Motivation Why do you want to improve? <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid red; border-radius: 10px; padding: 5px 15px; text-align: center;">Academic</div> <div style="border: 1px solid green; border-radius: 10px; padding: 5px 15px; text-align: center;">Social</div> <div style="border: 1px solid blue; border-radius: 10px; padding: 5px 15px; text-align: center;">Professional</div> </div> _____ _____ _____																																															
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4. Digging Deeper <small>(please ✓ the boxes where you would most like to improve)</small> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 45%;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/> Range of vocab <input type="checkbox"/> Grammar <input type="checkbox"/> Accent <input type="checkbox"/> Fluency <input type="checkbox"/> Confidence </div> <div style="width: 10%; text-align: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 40px; height: 40px; line-height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;">S</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 40px; height: 40px; line-height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;">L</div> </div> <div style="width: 45%;"> Hearing differences between sounds <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding the main idea <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding the details <input type="checkbox"/> Range of vocab <input type="checkbox"/> </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; margin-top: 20px;"> <div style="width: 45%;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Range of vocab <input type="checkbox"/> Spelling <input type="checkbox"/> Grammar <input type="checkbox"/> Argumentation <input type="checkbox"/> Referencing <input type="checkbox"/> Summarising ideas </div> <div style="width: 10%; text-align: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 40px; height: 40px; line-height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;">W</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 40px; height: 40px; line-height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;">R</div> </div> <div style="width: 45%;"> Reading at speed <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding vocab <input type="checkbox"/> Picking out the main ideas <input type="checkbox"/> </div> </div>		3. Strengths & Weaknesses <small>(please ✓)</small> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>I am confident</th> <th>I am somewhat confident</th> <th>I am not confident at all</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>Speaking</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>To classmates</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>To lecturers</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>In presentations</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Listening</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>In class</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>In conversations</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>In meetings</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Reading</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Textbooks/journals</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Menus/ magazines</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Writing</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Essays/reports</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Social media</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Emails</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </tbody> </table> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; margin-top: 20px;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> CAES <small>Centre for Applied English Studies</small> </div> </div> <p style="font-size: small; text-align: center;">Book Online at: http://caes.hku.hk/ve</p>			I am confident	I am somewhat confident	I am not confident at all	Speaking				To classmates				To lecturers				In presentations				Listening				In class				In conversations				In meetings				Reading				Textbooks/journals				Menus/ magazines				Writing				Essays/reports				Social media				Emails			
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5. Setting Goals

Having identified what area of your English language skills you are looking to improve, please assess the following with your advisor:

- What CAES workshops/discussions are available in this area when I am free?

- What resources are available in the Advisory Zone to help me in this area?

- What resources are available online to help me in this area?

- Having utilised these resources, when should I come back for another 1:1?

Stay in touch!



CAES English Language Support



caesadvisoryzone



Book Online at: <http://caes.hku.hk/ve>



Building a Picture of Usage Patterns in a Language Learning Space: Gathering Useful Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Katherine Thornton, Otemon Gakuin University, Japan

Nao Noguchi, Otemon Gakuin University, Japan

Abstract

While evaluation of a language learning space can be a difficult undertaking, it is possible to design evaluation instruments that both satisfy institutional demands for numeric data and also provide useful information that can be used to improve the space. This paper reports on the implementation, one quantitative and one qualitative, of two evaluation instruments at a small and relatively new self-access centre in Osaka, Japan. The area counting system gives rich data about how students are using the space, while the user experience survey provides much valued learner voices on different aspects of the space and its mission. Examples are given from the findings and how this data can be utilised to enhance the space itself.

Keywords: self-access evaluation, self-access management

In the highly competitive market that higher education has become in many countries around the world, managers of a language learning space (LLS) need to continually justify its position in an institution. However, evaluation is not only important to demonstrate return on investment. It is also vital for LLS managers to get a deeper understanding of the impact the centre and its activities are having on users' learning experiences, and the extent to which the LLS accomplishing its mission. However, Morrison (2005) points out how difficult it is to effectively evaluate such complicated spaces in which numerous activities are taking place, where different stakeholders place different emphasis on what should be evaluated and where it can be challenging to control for numerous variables. This view is emphasised by others in the field (Gardner, 1999; Reinders & Lazar, 2008; Riley, 1996).

This paper describes two evaluation initiatives used at an LLS in a university in Japan. A quantitative measure to collect data on user numbers has been adapted to give a more detailed picture of how the space is used. The picture of LLS usage that the tool reveals is then triangulated with qualitative data from a user survey, which provides an even more nuanced understanding of the space.

Analysing the data collected over time has enabled the authors (the director of the centre and its administrator) to develop a more detailed picture of how the LLS is contributing to the learning experience of its users, and which aspects of it need more attention. As Gardner and Miller (2015) recommend, the data gathered from the tools described in this paper is used for making decisions about the centre, such as scheduling and language policy.

This paper first describes the university context, then details the two initiatives used in the evaluation, describing how data from each of them can be used and interpreted. It concludes with some reflections on the process. As it forms part of a series of reflective case studies, rather than being a full research paper, more focus will be given to the evaluation initiatives than the actual results, in order to provide as much information and advice as possible to practitioners who may be interested in replicating or adapting the methods described.

Context

Otemon Gakuin University (OGU) is located in Osaka, Japan, and focuses mainly on humanities. English Café at Otemon (E-CO) was established in 2013. E-CO is a language learning space to support students' learner autonomy, provide an English speaking environment, and promote intercultural exchange. E-CO has a voluntary usage policy. There are three full-time staff members working at E-CO: a learning advisor, a teacher, and an administrator and it is affiliated with the Center for International Studies office (CIS) which is in charge of inbound and outbound exchange programmes and various short-term study abroad programmes. Although there is no direct integration with the curriculum, E-CO offers pre-departure programmes to students who are going on study abroad programmes, and, on request from faculty, E-CO offers orientations and student activities for extra credit. E-CO's mission is to:

- foster positive attitudes towards the learning of English at OGU
- develop students' English language proficiency so that they can successfully participate in a global society
- foster language learner autonomy and life-long self-directed learning skills
- generate interest in study abroad and cultural exchange programs
- nurture intercultural awareness and a sense of global citizenship

To achieve its mission, E-CO offers various kinds of support for students who are motivated to study English: learning spaces, materials, learning support services, courses for beginner and advanced level students, and different kinds of workshops.

Quantitative Evaluation Measure: An Enhanced Head-Counting System

We collect data about the number of users by using two different counting systems. When E-CO was established in April 2013, we started with simple head count of users as they entered the center. We divided the counting period into six timeframes according to five class hours and lunchtime. Head-count data is sufficient for revealing simple usage numbers. However, we were interested in language use and how students were using the centre, therefore we introduced a second counting system, which we will discuss in the next section.

Figure 1 shows the area counting sheet. In order to use this sheet, we divide E-CO into ten different areas and observe them six times a day. Some examples of the counting areas are: the Counter, Café Space, Quiet Study Space, and Group Space (see Figure 2). The middle of each class time and lunchtime was chosen as the counting time, as students are more settled than at the beginning or end of class time.

The area counting sheet is divided into three observation sections:

- (1) how many students are using that area,
- (2) which language they are using (English, Japanese or silent)
- (3) what the purpose of their usage is (social use, study-focussed use, studying English use, or watching a movie).

From this area counting system, we can analyse the language and purpose of usage not only in each space, but also at each time of day.

10:30	No.	Eng	Jap	Silent	Soc	S	S/E
Café							
Counter							
Indiv.							
Class							
Group							
Ed.							
SB							
E-Room							

Figure 1. The Original Area Counting Sheet

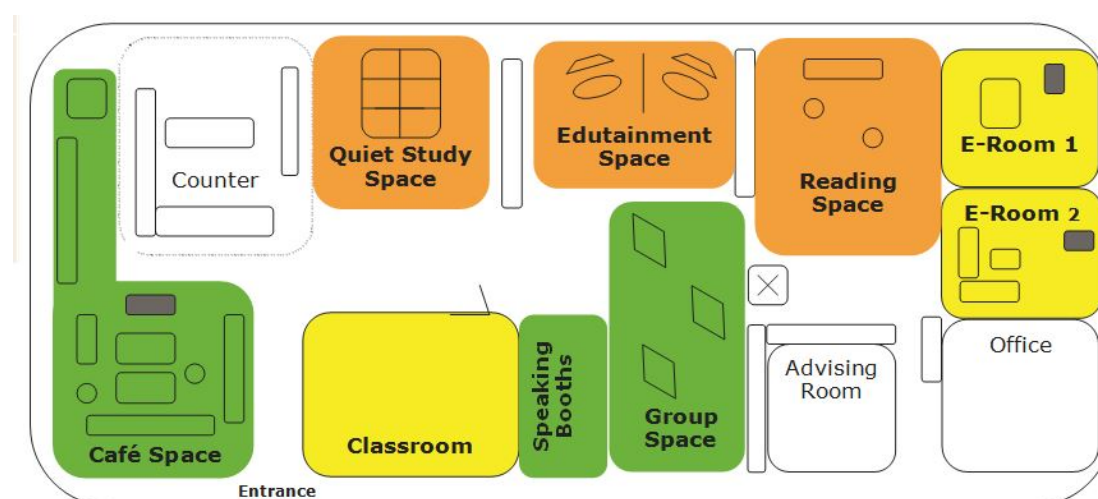


Figure 2. Map of E-CO

For language use counting, we count the language that we hear at that moment, so even if students were speaking English before counting, if students started to speak in Japanese at the moment of counting, it will be marked as using Japanese. Sometimes it is difficult to define usage. In that case, we either leave it blank or ask students casually.

In order to get a sense of whether the area counting sheet suited our purposes, a thorough pilot of the area counting data input process was conducted for four weeks in June 2013. Two changes have since been made over an 18-month period. First, following the initial pilot, another category was added. While using the first pilot sheet, we realized that it was difficult to define whether watching movies is social or

for studying English, as students sometimes used Japanese subtitles and may not concentrate on learning English. Therefore, we added a Movie section and started to collect data using this revised sheet from July 2013, using the data in internal reports from September 2013.

The second change was made after using the original counting sheet for 18 months to reflect changes in E-CO. After we bought a sofa for the Reading Space, students started to use the space more. In addition, E-CO volunteer student staff became more active in talking to students, thanks to further training and their increasing confidence, so we started to see more students standing by the book shelves and explaining their own study experiences or recommending materials. Therefore, we made an updated sheet adding two new categories: Reading and Standing. This sheet has been used since April 2015 (Figure 3).

10:30	No.	Eng	Jap	Silent	Soc	S	S/E	Movie
Café								
Counter								
Indiv.								
Class								
Group								
Ed.								
SB								
E-Room								
Reading								
Standing								

Figure 3. The Current Area Counting Sheet

Counting data results

So far, six semesters of data (from Fall 2013 to Spring 2016) have been collected and analysed. The counting data reveals several aspects of E-CO's usage that confirm our anecdotal observations.

Firstly, by comparing usage purpose data per semester between 2013 and 2016 (Figure 4), we can see that the space usage is changing and becoming more study focussed.

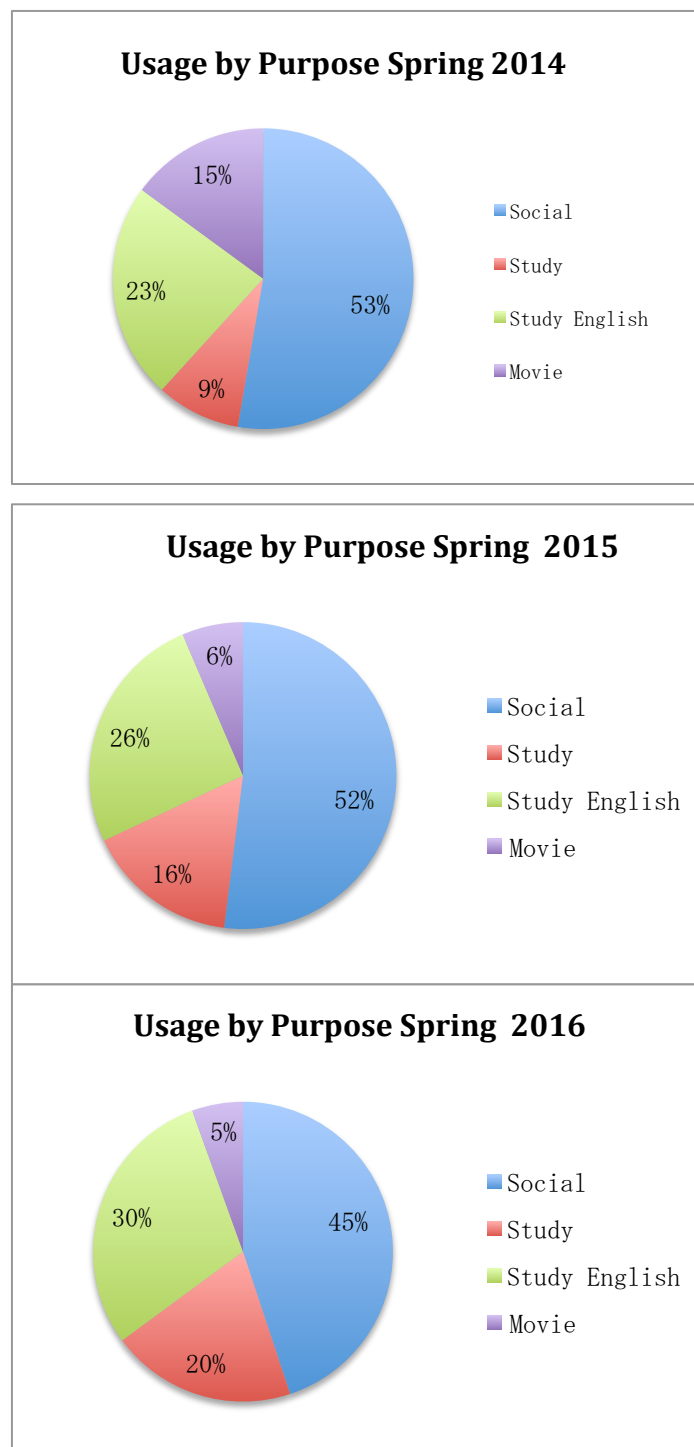


Figure 4. E-CO Usage by Purpose over 3 years (spring semesters)

Secondly, as Figure 5 shows, there has been a steady increase in the amount of Japanese spoken since Spring 2014, with a particularly low proportion of English in Spring 2016.

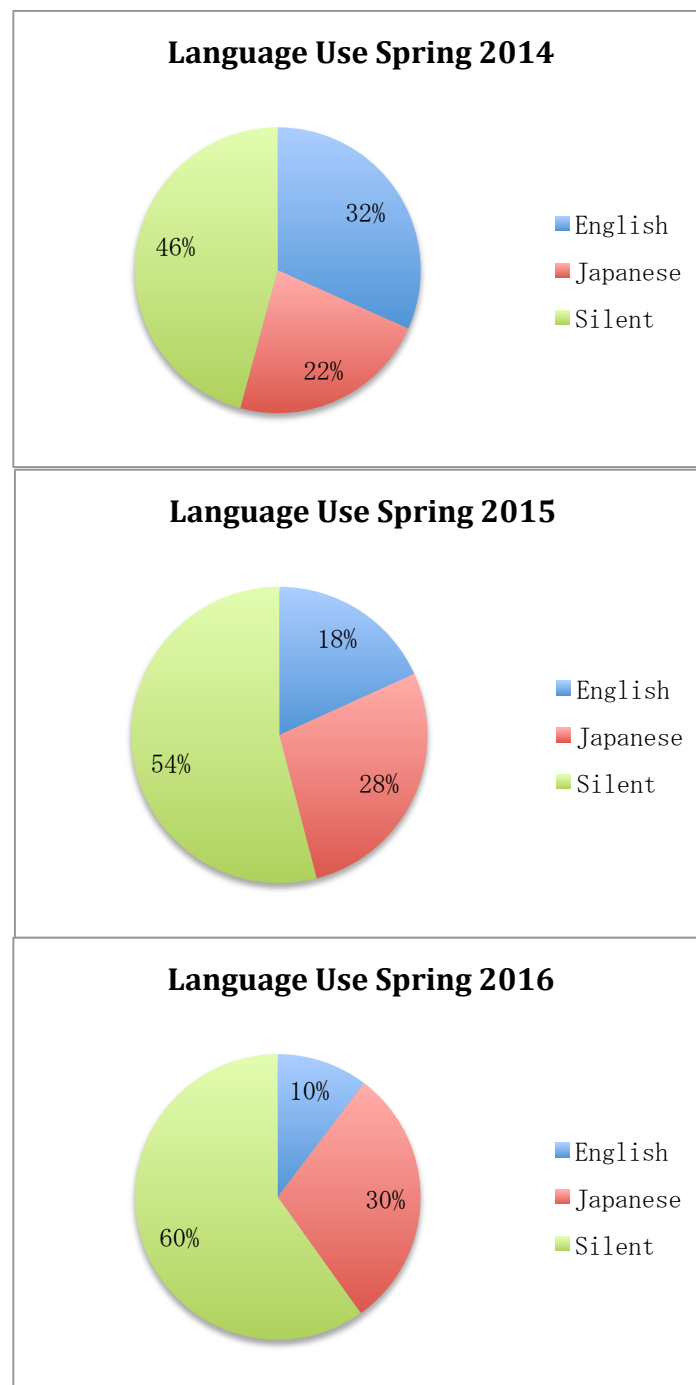


Figure 5. Language Usage in E-CO over Three Years

As one of E-CO's main functions is to encourage English interaction, this may at first glance be a disappointing finding, but it is not necessarily wholly negative. In part, it reflects a change in policy from April 2015 to be more tolerant of Japanese

usage, in order to encourage more lower proficiency students to use the space. The majority of advising sessions are held in Japanese, and students studying together may be discussing English grammar in Japanese, and therefore fully engaged in a learning activity while using Japanese. Equally, students discussing a study abroad experience, in Japanese, may inspire others, and thus be in line with E-CO's mission. Murray and Fujishima's (2013) longitudinal study into an LLS in a similar context reveals the affordances that students can gain from these kind of interactions, regardless of the language they take place in, and the data on usage purpose included above does demonstrate that study-focussed usage of E-CO is indeed increasing.

However, the low proportion of English usage in Spring 2016 is a concern, and we have introduced a new initiative to try to address it. Since September 2016 a 10-minute Active English Time takes place every hour in the Café Space, in which students are expected to speak English or otherwise engage in actively learning English. One aim of this new initiative is to raise awareness among users about making efforts to use as much English as possible. Although area counting is not scheduled to take place during these times, we are interested to see whether this initiative has an effect on the overall amount of English spoken in E-CO through raised awareness.

Revising the counting data sheet

In general we consider any English usage, whether for social or study-focussed purposes, to be productive use, and Japanese usage to be productive when it is focused on learning, but less so when it is purely social. The figures above show separate data for purpose and language, but it is sometimes (although not always, see below) possible to combine this data and understand, for example, whether students who were communicating in Japanese were focused on some kind of learning activity or just interacting socially.

10:30	No.	Eng	Jap	Silent	Soc	S	S/E	Movie
Café	5	2	2	1	2	1	2	
Counter	0							
Indiv.	0							
Class	0							
Group	2		2				2	
Ed.	0							
SB	0							
E-Room	0							
Reading	0							
Standing	0							

Figure 6. An Example of a Filled-in Area Counting Sheet

However, this becomes more difficult when a space has multiple users at one time. In Figure 6, for example, while we know the Group Space users were studying English in Japanese, it is impossible to tell whether the two Japanese speakers were using the Café Space for social use or studying English. This is a limitation of the current design of the sheet. While it would be useful to be able to collate precise data combining language and purpose, this would require a much more complicated counting system for each of the ten spaces, six times a day (see Figure 7 for an example). We are planning on piloting this new system for feasibility before the start of the next semester.

Café		Soc	S	S/E
	Eng			
	Jap			
	Silent			

Figure 7. An Example of Revised Area Counting Sheet Idea

Qualitative Evaluation Measure: The User Experience Survey

While the quantitative data gained from the area counting project gives us a general sense of how E-CO is being used by learners, richer data is necessary in order to investigate whether and to what extent we are meeting our mission (see above).

One way in which we have attempted to gather this data is through a survey administered to users. This survey has so far been conducted twice, in July 2014 and July 2016. The research questions the survey was designed to investigate were:

1. How is E-CO being used and by whom (frequency of use and of activities, what languages are being used)?
2. What impact do students perceive E-CO to be having on aspects of their learning?
 - a. Motivation for learning English
 - b. English proficiency
 - c. Interest in intercultural exchange and study abroad
 - d. Autonomous learning skills

The first research question provides another data set with which the results of the area counting project can be triangulated, whereas the second question provides data to examine the extent to which E-CO is fulfilling its mission. As stated above, researching such aspects of learning gain, in terms of both language proficiency and metacognitive development, is notoriously difficult in self-access contexts, so, while the data generated are only user self-perceptions rather than objective evidence of measured gains in the relevant mission areas, we believe it is nevertheless a useful starting point.

The bilingual survey is a combination of closed and open-ended questions, and takes around 15 minutes to complete. In July 2014 and 2016, over a period of two weeks, all students using E-CO for any length of time were asked to complete the survey. The same survey was used, with a few minor adaptations made in 2016 after examining the 2014 data. Some questions, investigating language use and publicity of the centre, were added in 2016. Details of the specific questions can be found in the appendix.

Insights from the survey data

Examining the survey data from both years reveals areas of growth or decline in terms of usage, shifts in the attitudes of users and their perceptions of E-CO's impact. As the survey has, as yet, only been conducted twice, any changes or improvements must be seen as tentative. While they could indicate a trend, two years of data is not enough to confirm this.

The survey reveals a fairly steady image of E-CO usage between 2014 and 2016, with a few small changes, both positive and negative. A similar number of responses was received each year (60 and 65), suggesting a similar number of regular users in both years. For reasons of space, this section will focus on the data for the second research question about impact of E-CO. Data collected about E-CO usage (research question 1), largely corroborates the data from the area counting sheet.

Through comparing the two data sets, we can track changes in student perceptions about the impact using E-CO is having on their learning. Changes in attitudes uncovered by the survey can tell us where we need to focus more attention in terms of achieving our mission. The number of students who consider that E-CO has had a big impact on improving their motivation, confidence and proficiency in the four language skills has increased in all areas in 2016 compared to 2014. However, there is one area where fewer students strongly agree that E-CO has had an impact: intercultural exchange, in terms of meeting foreigners, interest in foreign cultures and studying abroad. This suggests that we need to pay more attention to this area of our mission. While we have no control over the number of exchange students on campus, we can try harder in promoting E-CO as a place they can easily meet Japanese students, and have recently introduced conversation sessions run by international students.

Data-Driven Decision Making

In addition to raising our awareness about which areas of our mission require more effort to achieve, data from the evaluations has been used to inform decision-making in the centre in a number of ways, in terms of scheduling and introducing new initiatives.

There are two main ways in which the data gathered through the counting system can be used to inform scheduling. Events can be scheduled to fit in with existing usage patterns (e.g. scheduling English group speaking sessions at times when many students already tend to use E-CO in a social way) or to try to change existing patterns, for example by scheduling study-focussed workshops at a time when learners are often not using the centre very productively (i.e. when we have recorded common Japanese and social use.) This has led us to change our workshop schedule to focus on evening periods instead of afternoon periods, and has resulted in a higher attendance rate since 2015.

The finding of increased Japanese usage from the area counting, and some negative comments in the 2016 survey on this topic, has prompted us to reevaluate our language policy to actively encourage more English through the Active English Time mentioned above. While we already have anecdotal impressions of the impact of initiatives like this, the area counting data allows us to measure and confirm those impressions, and present them to university management in a more compelling way.

Reflections and Advice

While evaluating the impact an LLS is having on its users is certainly a complicated process, it is by no means impossible. This paper has shown how several relatively simple measures, both quantitative and qualitative, can be employed to reveal a picture of usage and impact. While each centre would need to adapt these methods to its own context, we offer the following advice to anyone interested in replicating any part of our evaluation.

- Area counting not only reveals usage patterns of E-CO but also gives administrative staff a chance to know the centre users better. Working at the counter, it is difficult to observe the whole centre. However, as area counting is done six times a day, staff can see what is happening by walking around and encouraging students who are studying hard. With every interaction with students there is a possibility to engage in micro-counseling, short, casual conversations designed to have students reflect their learning choices which Shibata (2012) suggests can be beneficial for students' learning.
- It is important to decide a fixed time to count to get accurate data for comparison. In E-CO, counting time is designed to measure when students are settled into activities, so we count in the middle of each class period and lunchtime.

While quantitative head count data may be able to satisfy certain stakeholders if sufficient growth is shown, those more concerned with the quality of the experience and educational affordances an LLS can offer will want to evaluate the space in other ways. Student voices, via the survey, are an important part of this process, and enable us to demonstrate growth in ways other than simple user numbers, such as increased motivation for learning. Other methods, such as interviews and focus groups, can yield much richer data and but can be more time-consuming to implement and analyse.

- In designing a survey about user experiences of the LLS, care should be taken to include questions which address areas of the centre's mission statement or other guiding documents, such as a strategic plan. Ideally, the evaluation methods should be built into the plan when it is developed. In hindsight, more attention to this aspect when designing our mission statement, for example by deciding the method and frequency of evaluation, we would have ensured greater emphasis was placed on the evaluation from day one.
- While student perceptions of impact can be useful, where possible findings should be triangulated using other data. For example, a reported increase in material use in the survey could be corroborated with borrowing records.
- Unfortunately, a survey administered in the LLS, not made available more widely across the university, may lack voices from less regular users. While every effort was made to approach every user over the administration period, responses were not received from those only borrowing or returning materials, or occasional users. Other methods, such as department or university-wide surveys or focus groups targeting these users, may need to be employed to understand this wider peripheral group's experiences of the centre.

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Looking Backwards and Forwards: Evaluating a 15-Year-Old SALC for Continued Growth

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Abstract

This reflective article gives an overview of how a self-access learning centre (SALC) in Japan approaches its ongoing evaluation. The author shares some retrospective evaluation approaches and also provides a description of a micro-evaluation as an example. The article concludes with some thoughts about two alternative approaches, one future-looking and one predictive, that might help a SAC to move into new directions.

Keywords: evaluation, strategic planning, self-access management

Evaluation is a necessary part of the overall SAC management as a way to ensure that users' needs are being met and that both efficiency (i.e. whether resources are being used optimally) and effectiveness (i.e. whether learning is taking place) are maximised. However, evaluation is notoriously difficult due to the nature of the complex processes that we are working with (Gardner & Miller, 2015; Riley, 1996). For this reason, colleagues in the field have approached the task in a variety of ways (see Gardner & Miller, 2015 for a summary). What all the documented evaluation approaches have in common is that they appear to be mostly retrospective. In other words, they look back at what has been achieved and measure or describe it in some way in order to either simply document, take stock, or to inform a future change.

In this article, I will briefly summarise the mostly retrospective approaches we have been taking to evaluate the Self-Access Learning Centre ('The SALC') at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) in Japan. I will share an example of how we have evaluated one feature of our SALC in order to show how a micro-evaluation looks in practice, and then finally share some thoughts about two alternative approaches, one future-looking and one predictive, that might help a SAC to move into new and uncharted directions.

Context

KUIS is a private university in Japan specializing in foreign languages and cultures. There are around 3800 students at the university who major in various European and Asian

languages, and all are required to take some English classes. The SALC was established in 2001 as a place where students could continue to use and study English outside of class and get support in order to facilitate the development of learner autonomy. The SALC is a busy centre receiving between 500 and 600 visitors per day. Use is optional and students have access to a number of different services and events designed to support the development of their language skills while promoting learner autonomy. The SALC team comprises of a director, four full-time administrative staff, two full-time designers, nine full-time learning advisors and around 35 part-time student staff.

Approaches to SALC Evaluation at KUIS

We have three approaches for evaluating the SALC at KUIS, all taking a retrospective approach. The first is *strategic planning* which is typically used in the business world. In many ways, a SALC operates as a small company so using this approach can be very helpful for systematic planning and also for creating, implementing, and communicating a shared vision. The second is a more micro approach which is conducting ongoing cycles of research on the various services and facilities in order to constantly evaluate and improve the SALC for students. The third approach is to establish cycles and timelines for the micro-evaluation.

Strategic Planning

The overarching approach to evaluating the SALC starts with a strategic plan which we visualise as an ongoing road map. The strategic plan is established periodically and then the evaluation involves evidencing whether the SALC has achieved its plan. Although this sounds simple, strategic planning is an ongoing endeavour and requires constant attention. Depending on university directions and events, the SALC team establishes the duration of each phase of the plan typically between five and ten years.

Mission and vision

All of the full-time staff participate in updating the strategic plan starting which involves (1) discussing the mission and vision statements and making changes if necessary, and (2) discussing and establishing broad focus areas. When possible, student staff also have a chance to participate in some of the meetings. Paying attention to the mission statement ensures that the SALC directions focus on core values and services. The vision statement is helpful for imagining future developments, drawing on global trends and technological advances and creating an image of an ideal future SALC scenario. As SALC director, I make sure that we revisit the mission and vision each year in order to keep us all on track.

Specific focus areas

In a series of meetings over the course of several months, sub-teams establish more specific focus areas and then break them down into achievable and measurable goals. Around three to four times a year, we meet to review what we have achieved and to confirm the priorities for the coming semester.

The current 2016-2026 plan has five focus areas, each with several sub-goals. The broad goals are as follows (the actual plan includes sub-goals, specific details, priorities, and timeframes):

Goal 1: To provide opportunities to develop language learner autonomy

Goal 2: To Provide a suitable learning environment and resources for our students' needs

Goal 3: To provide access to multiple learning communities to inspire and motivate learners

Goal 4: To increase language proficiency related to students' current and future goals

Goal 5: To collaborate with others and continue to develop our professional expertise

Evaluation using a strategic plan

Establishing and monitoring a strategic plan is a useful 'big picture' approach to evaluating a SALC. It is rewarding to be able to 'check off' achievements at the end of each semester and feel a sense of progress. However, updating a strategic plan each year can feel like a never-ending 'to do' list unless there is a chance to regularly revisit the vision statement. Ideally the strategic planning process benefits from including outside perspectives in order to generate alternative ideas and insights. This is something that we have not been doing at KUIS, but plan to initiate in the new academic year. In our case, this will require funding in order to invite SALC experts from other contexts to join our planning discussions.

Ongoing Research Cycles

A second approach to evaluating the SALC is to ensure that we engage in ongoing research projects as a way to systematically investigate aspects of the SALC detailed in the strategic plan. Each service, facility or event documented in the plan is evaluated periodically on an ongoing basis. The ultimate goal is to serve our students' needs, so the first questions related to each research project are always:

- What are the needs of our students? (these change, so this question should be revisited every few years)
- What are the best ways to support our students?

For ongoing research designed to evaluate and improve the SALC's features or services, the overall research questions tend to be the same:

- How well is this service/facility/event serving the needs of our students?
- How could it be further improved?

Research methods

The research methods tend to have been tried and tested over many years, often using the same instruments in order to see the development over time. They tend to draw upon multiple (and reasonably convenient) data sources, for example:

- A literature review
- Observation
- Usage figures
- Focus group discussions
- Questionnaires gathering learner perceptions, learning advisor perceptions, teacher perceptions, etc.

Some projects draw upon more innovative and/or time-consuming research methods such as:

- Discourse analysis
- Analysis of learner diaries or reflective reports
- Analysis of learner portfolios or other documents
- Interviews with users and staff members
- Longitudinal studies over several years

To illustrate how a SALC feature or service is evaluated according to a research cycle approach, I draw upon some research currently in progress and present an example project in the next section.

An example evaluation project

Purpose of the research. To evaluate the “Effective Language Learning Course” (ELLC)

Background. The ELLC aims to develop self-directed language learning skills in order to promote language learner autonomy. The content draws on the literature in the areas

of learner autonomy, self regulated learning and self-directed learning and is based on our students' needs (see Thornton (2013) and Takahashi et al. (2013) for details). The broad learning outcome areas are as follows (see Takahashi et al. 2013 for specific details):

1. Knowing about support / opportunities outside class
2. Setting and reviewing goals
3. Selecting, using and evaluating resources
4. Identifying, using and evaluating strategies
5. Making, implementing and evaluating a learning plan
6. Evaluating linguistic and learning gains

Research questions.

- How satisfied are the learners with the ELLC?
- After completing the ELLC, are students able to meet the course learning outcomes?

Methods

- Student survey to investigate perceptions and level of satisfaction with the course, also students' self-evaluations of learning gains as defined by the course learning outcomes.
- Analysis of learning journals, portfolios and reflective reports to investigate actual evidence of whether the learners demonstrated a working knowledge of the learning outcomes.
- Interviews with learners to reach a greater understanding of the findings.

Summary of the main findings. The questionnaire and interview data indicate a high level of student satisfaction with the course. In addition the participant responses show ways in which the course influenced how the students thought about their language learning. Students also generally felt that the course helped them to achieve all of the learning outcomes. The analysis of journals, reports, and portfolios indicated that in most cases, the majority of the learners demonstrated evidence of meeting most of the learning outcomes. The only learning outcome that was not adequately met was the students' ability to evaluate their linguistic development.

Outcome. As a result of the research, the SALC team can be confident that the course is mostly meeting students' needs. However, there have been discussions about how realistic it is to expect learners to be able to evaluate their linguistic development after just one semester. It is likely that the learning outcome will be adjusted.

Benefits and challenges of SALC evaluation using research cycles

Using research cycles has been a highly useful approach to engaging in continued evaluation and improvement of a service or facility. It ensures that the approach is systematic and well documented. Much of our ongoing research includes journal publications or conference presentations by team members at intervals. This creates a sense of achievement and emphasises collaboration as different team members work together at various points. Establishing research cycles is also useful for enabling new staff to join existing projects and contribute to the ongoing development of the SALC even in their first year at KUIS. There are a couple of points to be aware of however. The first is that if the research cycles are the only approach, it is important to periodically take a 'big picture' view in order to allow for innovation rather than simply continue to offer almost exactly the same service or resource year after year. The second potential challenge is that the research can be quite time consuming as it relies on multiple data sources. This can be managed by establishing a timeline depending on how often a service needs to be evaluated. I will discuss this point in more detail below.

Timelines and Cycles

Establishing timelines is something that has been improved upon recently having had experience of several evaluation cycles. Ideally timelines should be drafted alongside the strategic plan. Knowing how often to completely re-evaluate and how often to conduct micro-evaluations of a particular resource or facility is useful information in order to make the process efficient. For example, is it necessary to gather student feedback on courses each semester if the service remains unchanged, or is once every 3-4 years sufficient? A major re-evaluation might be needed every ten years, for example, revisiting the SALC philosophy, or evaluating its curriculum. Other micro-aspects of the SALC such as course evaluation, or evaluating the quality or usage of a service such as events, advising, orientations, or technology might typically be needed every three or four years. A practical evaluation timeline (based on a simplified version of the plans at KUIS) might look something like this (the shaded spaces indicate where a research cycle is in progress):

Table 1. Sample Evaluation Timeline

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
To evaluate:	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
Courses										
Advising										
Resources										
Curriculum										
Student staff										
Workshops										
Technology										
Space use										

Alternative Approaches

So far, I have described three retrospective approaches to SALC evaluation. As a team we have been discussing plans to test alternative future-looking and predictive approaches, but due to the lack of literature, guidance, and experience, these will be experimental. The first approach involves *data mining*, i.e. utilising large amounts of pre-existing data in order to learn something new about the SALC. The second turns to the business world to get insights from different industry leaders. Hayo Reinders is acknowledged for inspiring both of these ideas (personal communication, September, 2016).

Big data and learning analytics

Big data is a term to describe very large amounts of data that tend to be beyond the abilities of common statistics software (Manyika et al., 2011). *Learning analytics* is the actual measuring, collecting, analysing and reporting the data in order to optimize learning and learning environments (Long & Siemens, 2011). Long and Siemens (2011) describe big data and analytics as “the most dramatic factor shaping the future of higher education” (p. 31), but it has not been utilised to evaluate or predict self-access learning. Educational data mining and learning analytics would surely be a useful approach for predicting patterns of self-access use and seeing relationships between variables. According to Reinders (2016), drawing upon data we already have would allow us to conduct different kinds of analyses in order to (for example) visualise patterns, predict student performance, and identify student groups. We

could use this information to plan ahead, and design courses and tailored programmes for certain users. In our case, we can only guess that patterns such as the following are true:

- Students who take our SALC courses are more likely to continue to engage in lifelong learning.
- Students who attend regular SALC workshops and events will increase their language proficiency more dramatically than non-users.

Although, we do have some knowledge of trends due to our small-scale research findings, drawing on large data sets would help us to consider many factors that affect success in learning. Examples of these factors are: proficiency when entering the university, gender, age, classes being taken, grades in high school, major, study abroad, club activities, and part time jobs. We could also consider SALC-specific data such as whether students take our courses, attend workshops, or regularly meet with learning advisors has any affect on learning.

Currently we lack expertise in this kind of data analysis and would certainly require help and training, but it seems to be a very powerful tool. This would be a completely different approach and potentially transform the current process.

External evaluation

The second approach which would allow a completely different kind of evaluation, potentially identifying blind spots, oversights, and inefficiencies would be to invite external evaluators to perform the evaluation according to their own criteria. The obvious place to start would be to invite an experienced director of another SALC to undertake the evaluation which is not unusual in our field. However, it might be more beneficial to invite experts from different fields to also evaluate it. For example, perhaps the SALC could be evaluated by an accountant, a librarian, a restaurant owner, a department store manager, a manager of a language school, a careers counsellor, a bookshop manager, a high school teacher, and so on. As business owners and specialists, these professionals are likely to be skilled at running efficient systems and are likely to have significant training and experience in accounting, PR, advertising, marketing and other practices unfamiliar to SALC team members. The evaluation process would force us to ask and answer questions that we may not have considered before prompting new kinds of reflection.

Final Reflections

Writing this article has prompted me for the first time to document exactly how we evaluate our SALC and how all of the parts fit together. I recommend this process to everyone who (like me) has struggled to find the right way to show that their SALC is an affective and efficient entity. Each SAC will have its unique features, users, stakeholders, practices and priorities that will emerge and evolve over time which influence the evaluation process. The following points are a some general recommendations based on what has worked at KUIS for guiding the evaluation process:

1. Have an ongoing strategic plan
2. Break down the plan into manageable chunks
3. Celebrate successes frequently
4. Involve the entire team in the process
5. Draw upon research to guide changes
6. Plan research cycles in advance
7. Focus on learners' needs first
8. Revisit the mission and vision statements regularly
9. Include diverse, outside perspectives in discussions
10. Expect the evaluation to be an ongoing process

Notes on the Contributor

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